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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
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JODE'S LAST HUNT	Brian Garfield	6
THE FINAL TWIST	William Bankier	24
THE SPIRIT OF THE '76	Lillian de la Torre	31
TO BE CONTINUED	Barbara Callahan	47
C AS IN CROOKED	Lawrence Treat	57
'TWAS THE PLIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS	Herschel Cozine	70
AFTER THE STORM	L. G. Kerrigan	71
A PAIR OF GLOVES	Richard E. Hutton	73
WITH MORE HOMAGE TO SAKI	Isak Romun	88
THE THUMBTACK PUZZLE	Robert C. Schweik	95
RAFFLES AND THE SHERE KHAN POUCH	Barry Perowne	106
PLEASE DON'T HELP THE BEAR	Ron Goulart	127
ETIQUETTE FOR DYING	Celia Fremlin	135
THE PROBLEM OF THE CHRISTMAS STEEPLE	Edward D. Hoch	141
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER	Otto Penzler & Chris Steinbrunner	80
THE JURY BOX	Jon L. Breen	83

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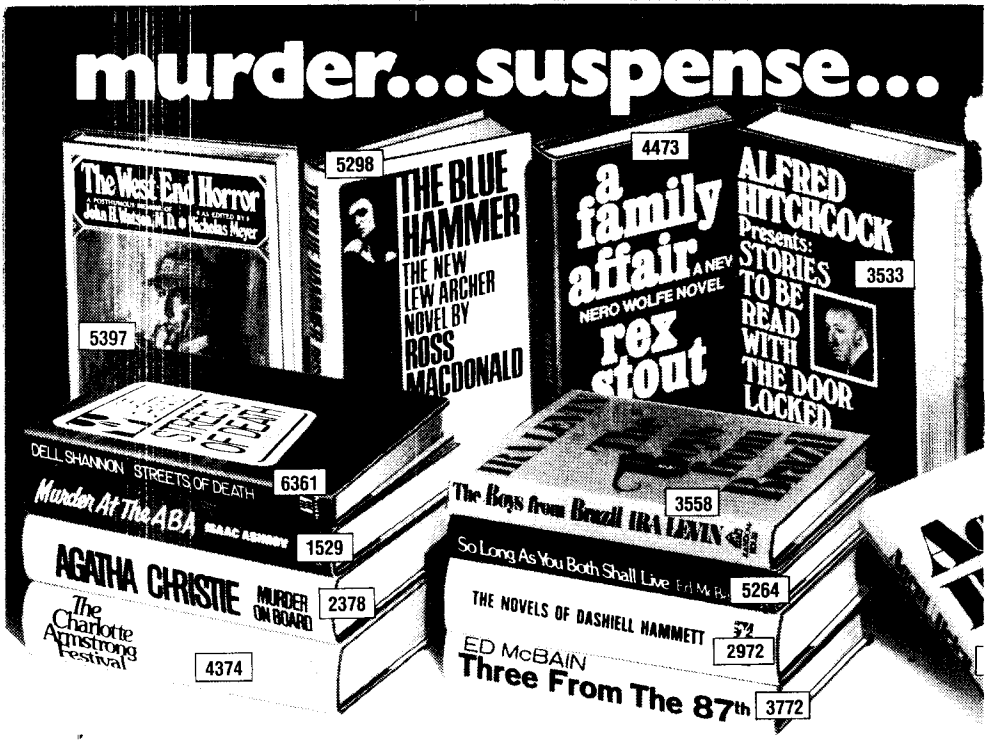

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a *NEW* Sheriff Jode story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Maria Skelton was a natural headline maker. Champion rodeo rider, runner of illicit whiskey, star of Western movies, horse breeder, hell-for-leather hellion, she was "forted up" with a rifle and plenty of ammunition and holding off an F.B.I. man and twenty cops with riot guns and tear gas. It's a long time since you've met someone like Maria.

Sheriff Jode knew how tough an adversary Maria was when he admitted, "You're pretty good." But he added, "I'm just a little better"...

This is Brian Garfield's first appearance in EQMM, and we welcome it heartily. Since we hope to publish more of Mr. Garfield's stories, we will introduce him now with only a brief excerpt from his "Fact Sheet." Brian Garfield is an "author, film producer, screenwriter, corporate executive, musician, ranchhand, teacher, world traveler"—in roughly reverse chronological order. He is perhaps most widely known for DEATH WISH, *his best-selling novel that was made into a smash-hit Paramount film, a Dino De Laurentiis release starring Charles Bronson, Hope Lange, Vincent Gardenia, and William Redfield...*

Brian Garfield's HOPSCOTCH *won the coveted MWA Edgar for the best mystery novel published during 1975.*

JODE'S LAST HUNT

by BRIAN GARFIELD

The night watchman thought he saw a flicker in the woods. He stepped off the platform and looked away and then looked again, but there was nothing.

Could be a squirrel. Sunday dawn was always jumpy. Any other morning the mill would be working—shifts moving in and out,

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but Sunday was silent because that was the Keenmeier management: pious about the Sabbath. On Sunday the only face he'd see would be the day watchman's at eight o'clock and that was still three hours away.

Red shafts of light slanted through the lodgepoles. He looked at his watch. Another half hour he'd do another round of inspection.

He walked to his car and got in. The coffee was still hot, but there was only half a cup left. He thought about saving it, but it would only get cool. He drank it down.

His eyes drifted along the length of the paper mill out of habit. It looked new and raw—they hadn't bothered with much paint. Smoke had discolored the buildings in patches. The big metal chutes were coated with ugly splashes. Along the parking lot the pines had been stained by the mill's outpourings.

He could hear the river. It birled over rocks just below the mill. Those rocks were colored by the guck that poured out of the mill's spouts through the spillway. Once in a while he walked over there and just looked at the colors on the rocks. Weird and very pretty—metallic colors, hard and brilliant.

Something flickered again in the corner of his vision and he looked that way into the woods.

He was reaching for the door handle to get out of the car when the mill blew up.

Sheriff Ben Jode in his Grant County Sheriff car made the turn off a paved road into the graded ranch drive. It lifted him to a rise where he put the brakes on and stopped at the crest to reconnoiter the situation.

Over across the valley was a mountain with a top shaped just like a biscuit, even to the corrugated cliffs that ran around its sides. That mesa dominated the valley. It was the highest point in the range; the other mountains swept gracefully away from it to either side, tier by tier. There were still white spots on the peaks—the remains of winter snow.

The valley was undulant high-country terrain—yellow grass slopes dotted with piñon and juniper and scrub oak. He counted more than 40 horses on the near pasture.

The road slumped into the valley. The main house was set up on a hilltop with a commanding view of its surroundings; below it the outbuildings and work headquarters were some distance away—corrals, two windmills, tack sheds, crew quarters, barn,

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silo. The house was isolated on its hilltop.

Several police cars of various persuasions stood parked askew a hundred yards or so below the house. Jode started driving down toward them. He made out a local cop car from Aravaipa town, two Highway Patrol cruisers, a white Rincon County Sheriff car, and even a station wagon with a dome-light on top of it—Fort Defiance Indian Reservation Apache Police. This was 20 miles outside the Reservation. It made Jode grin.

He went down the drive slowly and parked a distance behind the other cars. Cops in various uniforms were hunkered behind the cars. They were clutching rifles and riot guns and a variety of such artillery. The Rincon Sheriff, as tall as Jode and 60 pounds heavier, had a bullhorn in his hand.

Someone inside the house was shooting deliberately, without hurry, with a rifle. The reports were thin in the high air; the house was downwind and the shots almost seemed distant rumors, but Jode could see the pinpoint flashes from the windows.

Jode crouched low and made his way over to the Rincon Sheriff.

"Out of your bailiwick, but I'm glad to have you, Ben."

Jode said, "I picked up the radio call. Looks like everybody did. Who's the guy in mufti?"

"F.B.I. Name of Vickers."

"F.B.I.?"

"He's out of his bailiwick too."

The rifle kept popping at intervals. Not shooting at the cops, Jode noticed. Shooting at tires. The bullets were flattening nearly every tire on the various police cars. Jode looked back over his shoulder. He'd left his car far enough back; that rifle would have to be uncannily accurate to reach it from the house. At the moment the rifle wasn't even trying for it—there were plenty of easy targets right here up front.

"You're going to have quite a bill for tires."

The Rincon Sheriff grunted.

Jode said, "Who've you got forted up in the house?"

"Maria Skelton."

Jode felt the shock. It grenaded into him. "You're putting me on."

"No, sir."

"All alone?"

"All alone except she's got that rifle and she knows just exactly how to use it."

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Jode laughed out loud.

"Yeah, well, it's very humorous," the Rincon Sheriff said. "You notice she's got all the shutters closed. We can't get tear gas in there. I been yelling at her for an hour on the bullhorn. Didn't do no good, except about five minutes ago she took a notion to start target practise on our radial tires. Seems to have plenty ammunition up there." He looked down the row of cars at the fellow in the gray business suit. "Vickers wants to burn her out."

"Does he now."

"I'll tell you, Ben, twenty cops against one woman and we had to resort to burning down a sixty-thousand-dollar house to get her out? How you figure that's going to look in the newspapers tomorrow morning?"

"Not too good, Roy."

"Yeah. Well, there you are then. I figure the only thing to do is wait her out. Sooner or later she'll get tired or she'll get bored."

"That could take quite a while."

"You got any other ideas? I'd appreciate a suggestion if you got one, Ben."

"My county line's seven miles away. It's your jurisdiction, not mine."

"I don't mind deferring to you," the Rincon Sheriff said. "You been at this longer than I have. And besides—"

The Rincon Sheriff didn't finish it, but the meaning was clear enough. Jode might be a little past his prime, but he was a leader. They all knew him in this corner of the Southwest. The combat medals from Korea. The reform ticket on which he'd come into the Sheriff's office. The fact that Grant County used to be the most corrupt county in Arizona until Jode took the job; now it was one of the cleanest counties. The fact that the mob types who'd tried to establish a real-estate foothold had been run out ignominiously. And the spectacular solution Jode had provided to the string of psycho murders of teen-age girls back in 'sixty-eight. When he'd brought the Breucher kid in that afternoon, there'd been TV news cameras all over the courthouse lawn. The news films had been picked up by the networks and Jode had been in the limelight, a national celebrity for two days.

Jode had 16mm prints of those news films at home.

But since that episode it had been downhill for years. Things were quiet. Nobody messed around in Jode's jurisdiction. It was a big deal if his deputies had to arrest a routine gas station holdup

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team. Most of the time it was a matter of keeping drunks quiet in the roadside taverns and taking care of traffic duty.

Jode was still revered by people like the Rincon Sheriff and rural folk who thought of him as a cross between John Wayne and Buford Pusser. He knew it and he enjoyed it. But it was glory in the past and now they treated him as if he'd already retired. At times he felt things slipping away from him.

He kept remembering the Hollywood producers who'd talked to him back in 1968 when he was hot news. They'd wanted to make a movie about him, but finally they backed away. It would take something new and fresh—a new triumph to rekindle the legend of Ben Jode, get his name back in the headlines, and bring the TV vans pouring back into Grant County.

The woman forted up in the shuttered house—now there was a headline maker!

Jode knew quite a bit about her. Everybody did. He'd never met her, but he knew the stories.

Maria Skelton had been a champion rodeo rider. She wasn't Indian, but she'd grown up on the Fort Defiance Reservation. Her parents were missionaries. She knew horses and she knew the wild country—it was said she used to hang out with an Indian family that ran white lightning out of a still back up in the Biscuit peaks and Maria ran pack trains of the stuff along the back trails, or at least that was the rumor. She had a wild reputation as a kid. Then she took to winning horse-show ribbons and rodeos.

And along about 1961 she'd appeared in some Western movies. She didn't last too long as a movie star, but she'd invested her movie money and rodeo winnings; she bought this ranch in 1963. She'd settled down to develop the place into an important horse-breeding outfit and to enjoy life with her bridegroom who was a fun-loving stunt man she'd met when she was working in Hollywood. Between them they worked on the Appaloosa breeding strain that they hoped would make the ranch world-famous.

Maria had a reputation for being in and out of trouble constantly. They said she had a hearty tendency to get drunk and lay about her with chairs and handbags. For a slim small woman she managed to create quite a ruckus. She'd busted up some of the classier bars in California and Arizona. On one occasion it took four Hollywood cops to subdue her.

Then apparently as she'd got into her thirties she'd begun to

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grow up—laying off the firewater, staying closer to home, taking the horse-ranching job seriously.

Her bridegroom began to get bored. Or that was the story.

Then the Keenmeier lumber outfit alongside the ranch had decided to go into the paper business. It had built the enormous paper mill right on the bank of the river that separated the two properties.

The smoke and stink from the mill had begun to foul the air on the whole plateau. The effluents from the paper mill did unspeakable things to the river.

It had been common knowledge all through the high country: Maria was upset. She'd been yelling at the state's environmental protection people. But the Board numbered some people who were not to be believed. She'd got nowhere with them. She'd had to quit using the river to water her stock; she'd had to drill wells.

About that time her stunt-man husband evidently had got tired of the bucolic sameness of life on the isolated ranch with a wife who'd suddenly turned soberside. So he'd taken off for Los Angeles where rumor had it he was living with a TV starlet and doing movie stunt work and refusing to answer his wife's phone calls.

They said there were community-property legal problems involved in the settlement that had made Maria even more miserable.

About ten days ago somebody had tried to set fire to the baled paper on the mill's loading platform. But heavily compressed paper does not burn readily. The matches had done minimal damage. It was common knowledge Maria was the culprit, but there was no proof.

"She went and did it this time," the Rincon Sheriff told him. "Dynamite."

"The paper mill?"

"Sure enough. Good thing she's not an explosives expert. She didn't use enough dynamite. Didn't set the charges in the right places. All she did was knock off a corner of the building."

"Anybody hurt?"

"No. I guess that's why she picked Sunday morning—nobody around to get hurt. The night watchman spotted her running away this morning right after the blast. Called my office. We headed out here and you can see the rest of the story for yourself."

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"What's she trying to prove, Roy?"

"God knows what goes on inside the head of a crazy woman." The Rincon Sheriff looked up at the house with jaundiced resignation.

A cop made a run from one car to another. Maria's rifle spoke. Kicked up some dust, sending the cop leaping to cover. The Rincon Sheriff said, "She's just having herself some sport. If she'd wanted to hit him she'd have hit him."

"I'll tell you," Jode said, "I've got an idea."

In the night he took three of the deputies and moved in on the house, circling wide while the Rincon Sheriff tried to divert Maria by firing at the front of the house while Jode eased up on the back.

Jode pried a shutter open with a tire iron. He stood aside then. Two deputies threw tear-gas canisters inside.

They gave the gas a little time to spread. Then they fitted on their gas masks and climbed into the dark house.

They spread through the house. Open a door, throw a gas canister through it, wait. Then go in. You'd know if she was in there—*you'd hear the coughing.*

They split up, going into various rooms, peering through their gas masks, hunting for Maria.

They didn't find her.

Jode searched every room, but there was no sign of Maria. He went outside and waved the Rincon Sheriff up the hill. The posse approached hesitantly, wary of Maria's rifle. Two deputies came out of the house behind Jode, stripping off their gas masks; they stood there coughing, clearing their lungs.

As the Rincon Sheriff approached the house one deputy walked away from the house past Jode. The deputy was still wearing his gas mask and that puzzled Jode a bit. Some suspicion stirred in him, but then the Rincon Sheriff met him and they both turned to go inside—to conduct a more thorough search this time.

Jode went inside in his gas mask, throwing windows open to clear the place out. Peering into crannies. He glanced into the utility closet where the furnace and water heater were. He was about to turn away when something caught his eye—a boot. He went around behind the furnace and found that the boot was attached to a body.

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Not a dead body. A live deputy, neatly tied up and gagged, wearing only his drawers and shirtsleeves. Shorty, the smallest of the deputies.

"Oh, no," Jode said.

By the time he reached the front door he heard the mesh of the car's starter. The car drove away fast.

"My car," he said to the Rincon Sheriff. "She's got my damn car."

"That deputy in the gas mask leaving the house—"

"That was her."

The Rincon Sheriff threw his hat violently to the floor. Jode went outside and watched the dust diminish in the moonlit distance, silver on the hills.

The two men looked at each other. The Rincon Sheriff's mouth began to twitch. Then they both started to laugh.

Jode was half asleep in the swivel chair behind his desk. It was getting dark and the deputies went around the room turning on the lamps. After all these weeks they were still gossiping about Maria Skelton. A legend had started up.

"Maybe she's dead. Out there in the hills someplace."

"Me, I heard she's down in Mexico getting up an army of mercenaries to come back and wipe out the Keenmeier mill."

"Naw. I heard she went back to Hollywood. Getting her face fixed up by one of them plastic surgeons so nobody'll ever recognize her. Wants to get a job in the movies."

Jode said, "All of you shut up. I've heard all I care to hear about the woman."

And then Maria walked into his office.

She didn't come in voluntarily. She was handcuffed to Vickers, the F.B.I. agent. Vickers was yawning with great apparent fatigue. "I want her locked up for the night so I can get some sleep before I have to drive her the rest of the way down to Phoenix."

They put her in a cell. Jode said, "What about the handcuffs?"

"She keeps the hadncuffs on. Damn slippery eel!" The F.B.I. man glared at Maria and returned with Jode to the front office. Jode noticed the fingernail scratches on Vickers' face.

Vickers said, "I spotted her out in bare-eye daylight over in Albuquerque of all places. She was coming out of a bar drunk as a

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coot. She crossed state lines getting to Albuquerque and they found your car down in Socorro, so that makes it a federal case. My case." Vickers challenged Jode to dispute it. Jode didn't say anything.

Without asking permission, Vickers used the phone to call his district office in Phoenix. Listening to him talk, Jode knew what the F.B.I. man was thinking: it was only a three-hour drive to Phoenix on the Interstate and Vickers couldn't be *that* tired, but he obviously wanted to trundle into Phoenix in the morning instead of the middle of the night because he wanted plenty of sunlight for the cameras. He wanted the news media to have plenty of time to set up for the triumphant arrival.

Jode had no love for the F.B.I. man.

"You can sack out in the side room there. The night-duty cot."

Vickers didn't thank him, just went into the side room and shut the door, yawning ostentatiously.

Jode went back into the cells and shooed the wide-eyed deputies out. Maria was glaring at them like a caged cougar. When they left she glared at Jode the same way.

He said, "You may as well get some sleep."

"I don't need any sleep." She was still half drunk, he saw.

"That was pretty dumb, blowing up the paper mill."

"No. What was dumb was two things. I didn't blow up enough of it. And I got spotted by the watchman. Those things were dumb. Blowing up the mill wasn't dumb. That stinking paper mill. Listen, if I get another chance at it I'll finish the job."

Jode said, "What's it like being a movie star?"

"That puking paper mill," she said. "Ruining the earth. Poisoning the planet."

"Is it kind of fun out there in Hollywood? Wild parties like they say?"

"You let me get another load of dynamite out there and we'll see about that paper mill."

The office was a hubbub, all the deputies excitedly talking. Jode said, "I'm fed up. That F.B.I. man's trying to sleep. Now you can all get in your cars and go home or go out and patrol the county highways. Doesn't make any never-mind to me, but just get yourselves out of here."

When he was alone in the office he looked in on Vickers. The F.B.I. man was pretending to be asleep on the cot. After a few

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moments he began to snore. Jode made a face and shut the door, closing out the offending sound. He went back to the desk but didn't sit down. A thought had exploded into his mind. He went back into the cells.

She glared at him. He stood at the door and spoke. "Funny about Hollywood. I mean the way celebrities sometimes get to be movie stars. Athletes, they do it all the time—Jim Brown, Joe Namath. You got in the movies because you were a rodeo star, right? All it takes is some kind of famousness, don't matter what kind. You can get into the movies, right? A cop like Eddie Egan, for example—he's in that TV series now."

"It helps if you can act."

"What?"

"That was my problem, the reason I didn't last in pictures. I had the looks and I could ride a horse. Period."

All this time Jode was thinking very fast. Abruptly he left the cellblock.

He set things up swiftly. He took a rifle and a box of cartridges outdoors and put them in his jeep. He detached the glass face of the fuel gauge, which read nearly empty because he'd been meaning to fill it on his way home for supper but had forgotten. He broke off a piece of a paper match and used it to wedge the fuel needle over against the FULL mark. Then he replaced the glass. He drove the jeep around to the front and parked it in the No Parking zone and went back into the office, leaving the keys dangling in the ignition.

Vickers was genuinely asleep by now. Carefully Jode relieved him of the keys to the handcuffs.

In the cells he motioned Maria to come to the barred door. She hung back.

"I just want to take those things off your hands."

"What for?"

"You don't need them inside a cell, for Pete's sake."

"What about Vickers?"

"The hell with Vickers."

"You can say that again."

He unlocked the handcuffs and took them off her wrists. She watched him dubiously.

Then he unlocked the cell door. He didn't open it, but she knew it was unlocked. He went away, back to the office.

He crept into the side room, then silently and carefully placed

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the handcuffs, the handcuff keys, and the cell-door keys on the blanket beside the sleeping Vickers.

When he withdrew from the room he closed the door on Vickers and went back to his desk and sat.

After a while Maria came suspiciously into the room.

"Just one thing," Jode said. "Anybody asks, that F.B.I. guy went soft on you, turned you loose."

She didn't answer.

"It doesn't matter what you say, lady, they'll take my word over yours. I'm just telling you what to say to make it easier on yourself."

"Why?"

"Maybe I just don't like the F.B.I."

"Nuts."

Jode smiled. "Don't try the main roads. I'll have to set up roadblocks. You head back in the hill country. You got a few hours while I make noise around here."

"Jode, you're crazy or what?"

"You're pretty good back in the hills. Raised on the Reservation, right? But I'm just a little better. I'm going to catch you."

Now she smiled. She didn't speak. Her smile was as much as *That'll be the day, Jode. Old man.*

Fifty-one? Old?

She tossed her head and strode out.

In a moment Jode heard the sound of the jeep rolling away. He smiled.

He gave her twenty minutes to get clear of town, then he got on the radio and had the roadblocks set up. A couple of deputies came in for instructions. Vickers was waking up; Jode opened the door and the deputies looked in at Vickers as he sat up, looking in bafflement at the keys and handcuffs on the bed.

Jode said, "I step out for fifteen minutes and look what happens. She must've seduced him or something."

The deputies restrained Vickers when he tried to get to Jode.

When the Undersheriff arrived, rubbing sleep from his eyes, Jode told him to hold the fort. "I got an idea where she might be. You keep tabs on my roadblocks. I'll be in touch—may take a day or two. Keep hunting, right?"

Jode got in his Sheriff car and drove toward the mountains. He

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went up some back roads, found nothing, tried other back roads. She hadn't had much gas.

Probably she'd head for the Reservation, he reasoned. And finally he found the jeep up in the foothills near the Reservation fence, where Maria had run out of gas. He looked inside and saw the fuel gauge still jammed over on the FULL mark. He lifted the faceplate off and removed the piece of match. The needle fell over on EMPTY.

Jode took the rotor out of his own car, disabling it so that Maria couldn't double back and steal it. You couldn't count on her not knowing how to hotwire a car; she was a pretty astute lady. Then he looked up at the towering mountains ahead. There was a whole range of them between here and the Biscuit.

He went back to the car, got out a backpack, strapped it on, and slung the rifle over his shoulder.

And started tracking. On foot.

Her spoor took him high back into the mountain passes. Once he found a place where she had stopped and thought about setting up an ambush. He looked back down the slopes from this point—he could see for miles, all the way out onto the plain to the town. So she'd seen him coming after her. She knew he was back there. But she'd decided against waiting for him.

She had something else on her mind.

The paper mill, he reckoned.

He kept climbing. He was going to have to catch her fast because he'd given her this chance and she'd meant it when she'd said she'd take care of that paper mill. It put an urgency in him because he knew if he didn't nail her fast there wouldn't be much in the way of headlines for him.

So he put on an added burst of speed.

And walked right into her trap.

It was just on sundown. She disarmed him efficiently. At gunpoint she forced him to build a fire; then she told him to take off his belt and make a loop, and when she had him the way she wanted him she sat down on his rear and pulled the belt up tight, fastening his hands together behind his back. She used a rifle sling on his feet and when he was trussed up properly she retreated to the fire.

She said, "I didn't see the point in the both of us freezing to

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death in the dark. This way I can keep an eye on you and at the same time we can have a nice cozy fire. Besides, you didn't put any food in the jeep."

"Sorry. I forgot."

She raided his pack for food. Jode said, "How about me?"

"Suffer. I'm not untying your hands. And I'm damned if I'll spoon-feed you."

So he went hungry.

After a while he said, "You could just kill me, I suppose."

"What for?"

"I'm going to make trouble for you otherwise."

"Well, I don't kill people. What do you think I am?"

"You don't mind blowing up buildings."

"This is Friday night, Jode. Sunday's my day for blowing up buildings. With nobody in them to get hurt."

"You got the dynamite right handy, have you?"

"Right where I left it. Not two hundred yards upstream from the mill. Cached it in a beaver hole by the riverbank."

"Well, then you've got the whole thing figured out, haven't you?"

"Sure have."

"Except one thing."

She said, "What thing?"

"Me. I don't aim to let you do it."

"You don't have a whole lot of choice, Jode."

He considered that. "Well, look, you may blow up the building all right, but sooner or later I'm going to catch you."

"Somebody will. I doubt it'll be you. You're not fast enough."

She washed the last of her meal down with coffee, glanced at him, made a face, and brought the coffee over to him. He tipped his head back and she gave him all he wanted to drink. Close up to him that way she seemed small and fragile; he marveled at her physical stamina. She was a good-looking woman, he couldn't deny it. How old did she have to be? Well, somewhere short of 40, he reckoned. But not far short of it. She could have passed for a lot less, though.

"If you know you're going to get nailed anyway, why do it?"

"Because it's got to be done. The damn paper mills of the world are destroying everything anybody ever had that was worth living for. I'll tell you, that paper mill is everything that's wrong with the world. They run it with a big computer that just doesn't lis-

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ten. The computers run the industrialists and the polluters—they just think they're human beings. The computers run the government too. Government just sits by while the paper mill ruins my marriage and my ranch and the whole damn world."

"You going to rail against everything that's happened since the year eighteen and twelve?"

"I'm talking about paper mills and everything they stand for. Among other things, of course, they stand for paper. The world is strangling to death, Jode, in a big old bureaucratic snarl of paper. How many forms and reports you got to fill out every time you go and arrest somebody for denting his neighbor's car or letting his dog loose on private property?"

"Well, you do have a point there."

"Somebody has got to stand up and make a very loud statement right here and now about the damn paper mills in the world, Jode. Because if we just let them go on and on the way they're going now, the whole world is going to drown in a sea of paper and get poisoned to death by the junk that comes out of those flumes in the river and those smokestacks on the top. And I'm just the person to make a very loud statement about all that. I've had plenty of practise being loud and obstreperous and obnoxious. I've been a pain in the neck to everybody ever knew me. It's my chance to do my penance, and I'm taking it. Man I wish I had a drink. You haven't got any puma sweat in that pack, by any chance?"

"No. I had a couple beers but I drank them on the way up."

"Inconsiderate of you."

"Yeah, well if I'd known we were going to have a picnic together I'd have saved them."

"That paper mill's ruining the whole valley under the Biscuit."

"You already said that."

"Maybe this time you're listening."

"Lady, what if I agree with you? It still doesn't matter. I still got the laws to enforce."

"Why? That law is wrong, Jode, and you know it. Any law that lets a computer poison the earth for the people is wrong."

"The Keenmeier brothers aren't computers. They're real. I've met them."

"The Keenmeier brothers are pencil-pushing accountants. All they know is numbers. You call that a human being?"

"Well—"

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"You *think* I'm some kind of ecology freak?"

"I don't know, Maria. All I know is I'm the Sheriff and you're the bad guy and I've got to arrest you and take you in."

"Well, you didn't do a very good job of that, did you?"

"We're still a long way from the finish line," he said. And then he realized what was happening. How distracting she was being. Trying to get his guard down, trying to make sure he was too occupied seeing her side of it and sympathizing about her plight to worry about escaping.

He thought about all those TV cameras again. Hollywood. It brought him back to reality. He started burning his brain to figure out a way to get loose and get the drop on Maria. There had to be a way.

But he was still trussed up at dawn when Maria said, "So long," and walked away into the mountains, heading downslope toward the pass by the Biscuit and the valley below—toward the ranch, the river, and the Keenmeier paper mill.

Feverishly Jode tried to get loose. He started shredding the flesh off his wrists, but the belts were tight.

It took him nearly two hours of rubbing the belt against the blade of a quartz outcrop before the leather parted. He unstrapped his feet and stood up, a bit wobbly and cramped. He stamped around to quicken the circulation.

Then he started down the mountain.

He kept imagining the headlines. His future when Hollywood filmed *The Ben Jode Story* with Jode himself playing the title role. He ran pellmell down the canyons.

"Now quit this," he told himself, "don't be so stupid. You twist your ankle you'll never catch up." So he forced himself to slow down and move with reasonable care through the rocks.

He still had the rifle sling. He'd left the near-empty pack up on the mountain because it would only have slowed him down; he'd eaten and drunk what he could and now he was traveling light. He had a use for the rifle sling; everything else had been superfluous.

It took him the rest of the day to get down onto the slope of the Biscuit with the cliffs looming high above him. The valley was still ten miles away but he kept going in the night—it was a quarter moon, enough to see by, and he knew damn well *she*

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wouldn't stop. She had that Sunday-morning appointment at the paper mill. And anyhow there was no need for light to follow her tracks. He didn't need to follow tracks. He knew where she was going.

It must have been three in the morning when he finally came down off the foothills and into the valley. So footsore he could hardly keep moving but he did.

From a hillside he surveyed the night. Dark spots on yonder hills might be scrubs and might be grazing horses; he kept looking until one of the scrubs moved and he knew it was a horse. Maybe half a mile down. He went that way.

This hour of the night a horse was bound to be skittish and he worked his way carefully, staying downwind, making a loop in the rifle sling. An ambush wasn't going to work; he came around a piñon slowly into the horse's eyeline and started speaking with soft persuasion.

"Ho boy, take it easy now, ho."

He kept talking while the Appaloosa eyed him suspiciously. It snorted a couple of times and pawed the earth. A gelding, about fourteen hands. Handsome spotted coat. Bright-eyed, a young one. He kept talking amiably.

"Gentle down now, ho boy, ho."

The gelding whickered and then he had the loop around its muzzle. He patted the horse's neck and talked to it for a while before he swung up bareback, clinging to the end of the rifle sling that he kept wrapped around his knuckles.

The horse pitched him off, but he made it a point to keep his grip on the end of the sling. He climbed on again and got bucked off again, but after the third try the horse was resigned to the idea and only did a few token scampers before settling down.

Jode eased his bruised hip to one side and rode awkwardly, sitting on one buttock mostly, walking the horse for the first half mile or so. Then he knew that wasn't going to do. He wasn't the only one out here with a reason to snag a horse—and these were Maria's horses. She'd have snagged one a lot faster than Jode did. So she still had a good jump on him and he had to move as fast as the horse could take him.

He kicked it to a canter.

He came over the last hill and got off the horse, turned it loose, and threw the rifle sling around his waist, cinching it up in case

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there'd be a later use for it. He ran down into the trees, guided by the sound of the river somewhere in the pines.

He came in through the woods and found Maria skulking near the mill, moving crouched-over, backing up—paying out wire.

Jode searched the trees swiftly and found the plunger about 40 yards behind her. She was still backing toward it, uncoiling the wire. It meant she'd already set the charges under the mill and she was ready to hook up the wires and blow the detonators. He was just in time.

He crept up behind the plunger and waited behind a tree until she backed right up to him and then he grabbed her.

She struggled so much that she put him in mind of a wolverine he'd cornered once. But he got the rifle sling around her and pinioned her arms with it. Neither of them cried out; it was a silent struggle and he had the advantage of weight. He used her belt to bind her wrists and then he sat her down to tie her ankles. She glared her rage at him.

Jode grinned. "Guess I knew one more short cut than you did. Did I tell you my daddy used to take me hunting up along the Biscuit all the time?"

"Well, I guess you got your movie deal."

"Bet your bottom."

She sat there staring through her frustrated tears at the paper mill over there through the trees. The night watchman sat in his car drinking coffee. Water frothed over the rocks and Jode saw the fantastic colors.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" she said.

"What?"

"Another five years every tree on that bank will be dead. That stuff gets into the roots."

The water swirled over the fancy colors in the rocks. Jode looked at the ugly stains on the pines, at the smoke stains on the stacks of the mill. He smelled the pervasive stink.

He heard the car before he saw it. He looked that way, saw it flickering through the pines, recognized it, and therefore wasn't surprised when it pulled in beside the watchman's car and Jode saw the man in the gray business suit at the wheel.

Vickers glared around with hard angry eyes.

So the F.B.I. man wasn't as dumb as he seemed. He'd figured this out for himself.

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"Well, hell," Jode said. He fixed the wires onto the plunger.

"What the hell you doing, Jode?" She was excited.

Jode pushed the plunger and the blast threw him back flat on the earth.

Pieces of paper mill hurtled through the forest. A wave of sudden heat swept over him, curling the pine needles around them.

He kept his arms over his face until the debris settled. When he sat up he saw the two cars half buried under debris. A door opened, shoving stuff aside. Vickers came out and stood on top of the junkpile. The watchman came struggling out.

Jode pushed her down—slowly because it was movement, not presences, that Vickers would see if he looked. On the ground he worked the leather bindings loose and freed her. Then they crept belly-flat and worm-slow until they were far back in the shadowed woods.

When he looked back he could see the two men climbing through the rubble. Nothing left of the mill above its foundation. A tall heavy pine had toppled across the site. He said, "You used enough dynamite this time for sure."

"Jode, what on earth did you do that for?"

He considered the wreckage; he took her hand and walked her away through the pines and after a little while he began unaccountably to laugh. "Beats hell out of me, honey."

"Q"

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a NEW crime story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

It was a small advertising agency—the boss, an art director, a copy writer, and a production manager. The boss was despised and hated by his three underlings—for good and sufficient reasons. So the three employees concocted an imaginative murder scheme—as only the Creative Department of an ad agency could dream one up. "The premise was preposterous, but we kept the monster alive . . . and it put on weight and developed a sort of zany credibility" . . .

THE FINAL TWIST

by WILLIAM BANKIER

There are three things that need to be said about the killing of Murphy Stevenson. First, he deserved to die. Second, he died quickly where some might have said he deserved to suffer. Third, he *did* experience at the end a few seconds of exquisite mental anguish because of a simple action performed by Eloise Knott. She could not resist giving him the final twist, the final cruel shock. I don't think I would have thought of it, but then, Eloise is a woman. And Murphy had made her furious.

I remember how she sounded off to me after Stevenson had played his dirty trick on her. "That man has stepped on my toes," she said, sounding like a heavy in a spaghetti Western. Eloise is "one of the boys" and sometimes speaks with very little lip movement. She rolls her own cigarettes, yet she is female all the same. "I don't like it," she emphasized, "when they step on my toes."

"Hell hath no fury," I ventured, "like a woman's corns."

She let it pass and we got on with planning Murphy Stevenson's leap to death which was to be witnessed by the man in the top-floor office of the high-rise building across the alley. We made

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sure that he saw Stevenson alone on the roof, saw him position himself on the parapet and take his final dive. That's what made the coroner's verdict a clear case of suicide. That is how we got away with murder.

Let me emphasize right here that I, Brendan Tilford, am not in favor of people committing murder and getting off scot-free. On the other hand, I believe that extermination is a legitimate activity and should be pursued with efficiency whether the object is a nest of cockroaches under a kitchen floor or the sadistic head of a small advertising agency.

It would be hard to imagine an ad agency more compact than Murphy Stevenson Associates or a man more cruelly sadistic than our president, good old Murph. A couple of examples from his long and nasty record should establish our case against him.

Take the Christmas Bonus Deception which was perpetrated last year. We were accustomed to receiving a bonus of two weeks' salary on December 15th. We depended on it to buy our presents and our holiday booze. But it had been a bad year in the business community; the economy was on the rocks, profits were down the drain, and most firms had let it be known there would be no melon to slice this time around.

So we went to see the boss one afternoon late in November, Eloise and myself and Farley Dixon who make up the entire staff, and we put the question to him. If there was to be no money, we wanted to know now.

Stevenson hung that big face in front of us, gnarled and russety like the last apple in the barrel. "You get your bonuses, that I promise you." He raised his arm and we could see a salty circle in the armpit of his pin-stripe jacket. "Have I ever lied to you?"

We went about our business then, I writing copy, Eloise designing the layouts, and Farley Dixon looking after everything else—typesetting, engravings, shipping of material to publications. When December 15th came and went and we received only our regular paychecks, a tremor of angst ran through the office. But Stevenson strode about with a smug grin one side of his face, humming *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town.* So we waited.

Then on the afternoon before Christmas Day he came round to our offices, delivered sealed envelopes, and said in his loudest client voice, "Glad tidings of comfort and joy!"—and stepped into a descending express elevator. We opened our envelopes and each of us found a $5 bill wrapped in a typewritten note which said:

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"As you know, it has been a bad year for this and every other agency. But Stevenson maintains his unbroken record of always awarding a bonus, even though this time it has to be only a token payment. The spirit is there, if not the substance.

Merry Christmas,

Murphy K. Stevenson."

We drank up our bonuses quickly in the bar downstairs and I think the plot to get rid of Mr. Stevenson was hatched then and there. Not the details but the idea—the wish to see it done. Never underestimate the power of such a wish. Because of a determination no more sincere than ours, today there are man's footprints on the moon.

You may be wondering why we did not simply hand in our resignations while telling Murphy K. Stevenson to stick his five-dollar bills into his checking account. Well, to begin with, the economy was indeed slow. Jobs in advertising agencies were scarce as subway seats at rush hour, and when you had one, you sat in it.

Besides, we were a picturesque group of misfits not ideally suited to job interviews. I am a former high-school English teacher with a drinking problem. It shows in my nose. Eloise is a good designer but she is also a hysteric and a compulsive talker. I have seen people crawl out of her meetings, stunned like blast victims. As for Farley Dixon, he had suffered from some sort of obscure illness when he was a teen-ager. He still has a full deck to play with, but his eyes don't focus too well and his speech contains a lot of air and bubbles.

So we slave on for wages, putting up with Stevenson because he puts up with us. Why, then, make plans to eliminate the man? Would that not be, so to speak, killing the lizard that lays the golden eggs?

Not at all. If Stevenson cashed in his chips, the firm would go on. Our clients would still need their ad campaigns and we three were the team who wrote, designed, and produced them. Without old Murph, the client contact, we would simply do our jobs while arrangements were made for new leadership. Most likely some larger agency would absorb us into their operation.

Perhaps the crucial example of Stevenson's inhumanity was his treatment of Eloise Knott. This happened shortly before I joined the company and was told to me by Farley Dixon over beer in the bar. It seems my copywriting predecessor was a youth named

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Skippy Schiff. He was handsome, a competent writer, and because he was young and single and simple, Stevenson was able to pay him peanuts.

Anyway, Eloise and Skippy began having lunch together and one day they realized they were in love. Since this was a new experience in Skippy's young life and a rare phenomenon in Eloise's older one, they made no secret of it. They had got it, so they flaunted it. Naturally Murphy Stevenson became aware of what was going on.

Then he did three things. He began courting Eloise Knott with great energy, wining and dining her every night, whipping her away for weekends in Vermont, walking her significantly past windows where diamond rings were on display. When she succumbed to the seriousness of his approach and told Skippy it was finished between them, Stevenson fired the copywriter, gave him two weeks' pay, and sent him packing. Then he let one more week go by before ending his courtship of Eloise Knott. He never took her out again.

A shaken Eloise went looking for Skippy, but the boy had climbed aboard a boat for South America. Gone on the tide.

"Why do you suppose the boss did a rotten thing like that?" I asked Farley.

"He looks on all of us as his property," Farley said. "He resented the boy coming in and taking over his art director."

"Crafty guy," I said. "If he'd just fired Skippy straight away, she'd have quit and followed him. Right?"

"Right." Farley's eyes looked two different ways, his mouth ajar with beaded bubbles winking at the brim. "She almost left anyway, but I asked her what would happen to me, so she stayed on."

This loyalty of Eloise Knott's turned out to be Stevenson's tough luck. Because the plan to do him in originated with her—the "hell hath no fury" thing. I remember sitting in her office one afternoon as she doodled on her pad and started the idea rolling. The premise was preposterous, but we kept the monster alive for a couple of days and it put on weight and developed a sort of zany credibility. If you have ever worked in advertising, you'd realize this sort of thing can happen.

So we talked and dreamed and drank in the evenings and made lists of what props we'd need. We went up on the roof which was just two floors above us and looked down 23 stories to the alley below. From the roof Eloise noted the line of sight into the office

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of the man in the next building who always worked late and would become our eyewitness. We observed that he could see the rooftop but that a ledge blocked his view of the alley below. Perfect. Then we got down to the details.

I was sent to the hardware store to buy a gallon of flat white exterior paint and a brush. Farley organized a slide projector and a tape recorder and I helped him dub the required sounds on tape. Eloise herself went round to the publicity department of the Municipal Fire Department and borrowed the required photograph which she converted into a color slide.

Then it only remained to choose our evening and set the plan in motion. We were under no pressure; if something went wrong, we could abort at any stage and postpone our retribution to a more suitable night.

But nothing went wrong.

On the afternoon of the appointed day I went into the alley and painted a large area of the pavement flat white. There was no vehicular traffic in this narrow lane; the most the surface might acquire would be a few dusty footprints.

Farley Dixon then tested the slide projector. He took it into the washroom near his office and extended it through the window on the wooden frame he had built, aiming it down at my white patch on the alley and switching it on. The image was pale, but after dark it would be fine.

Then, at a quarter to five, Eloise set up Murphy Stevenson. She went into his office and said, "Mr. Stevenson, we are having a little drink in the Creative Department."

Our peerless leader glanced at his watch. "Not for another fifteen minutes, I hope."

"Of course not. And we'd like you to come and join us."

"Why me?" he probed.

"Why not?" she countered.

So in he came, pausing in the doorway, observing the gin, ice, mixer, and polished glasses, his shifty eyes darting here and there. Back in the days when he was a despised schoolboy, good old Murph must have been the butt of many a practical joke and he could sense the setup here. But he could not put his finger on it. He sniffed his empty glass before I poured the gin, he let us drink first, then he sipped tentatively. And immediately his own physical condition betrayed him. He became drunk quickly, and from then on it was easy.

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We let him do most of the talking, arrogant and abusive and then incoherent, while I kept on pouring and Eloise raised her glass occasionally to the man in the office across the alley. Then, as darkness fell over the city, we moved our plan ahead. First, Farley Dixon excused himself and I knew he was organizing his slide projector and his tape recorder. When he came back, Eloise went out and set the fire. She did a good job. Within minutes of her return the smell of smoke reached us from the hall.

"Hey," I said, "the place is on fire!"

"What do we do?" Eloise asked.

"Stay away from elevators and stairwells. They're death traps in these tall buildings."

"What, then?"

"The only safe place is the roof." I took Stevenson's arm and dragged him into the hall. Farley and Eloise followed, closing my office door to keep the smoke, which was thick out here, from becoming visible to the man across the way.

Stevenson's eyes got big when he saw the smoke. He was moving erratically under his load of booze and I had to guide him up the two flights of stairs to the roof. There I snapped on the tape recorder Farley had planted behind a ventilator. Below us I knew Eloise was using soda water to extinguish the fires in the wastebaskets before the smoke alarmed the building staff.

I went to the parapet overlooking the main street and looked down. At the same moment Farley's tape-recorded fire sirens began to sound through a mix of traffic noises, the sirens distant at first, then drawing nearer.

"Do you see the fire engines?" Stevenson was hanging back from the edge.

"They're heading around to the alley side. Traffic is too thick over here."

My boss confronted me, his dazed eyes full of panic. "Listen, they don't have ladders this tall. How do we get off?"

"They have safety nets," I said. "Just like jumping into a feather bed."

The sirens stopped. It was not in the plan for me to be seen on the roof, so I said, "Take a look over the alley side. See if the net is up."

Stevenson went and looked over. "That was fast," he said. "There's a ring of firemen down there holding a net." He rubbed his gin-dimmed, smoke-bleared eyes.

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"Don't think about it then, Murph. The longer you hesitate, the harder it will be. Just jump."

And he did.

I was surprised, really, that he went for it. I was also surprised that as soon as he disappeared over the edge, he screamed all the way down. Men jumping into safety nets don't scream; they probably hold their breath.

I asked Eloise and Farley about that when we had tidied up the premises and the police ambulance had come and gone, taking away Murphy Stevenson's body. Their report was terse and I noticed a wary tension between the two of them.

"The slide looked beautiful on the white paint," Farley said. "Just like on a screen. The firemen looking up and the big net held between them—very realistic."

"As soon as you were on the roof," Eloise said, "I telephoned the man across the way. I said my boss had run out of the place and we were worried. Could he see him on the roof? That got him to the window looking up."

"Fine," I said. "There's our eyewitness if needed. Stevenson was alone, he jumped, therefore suicide." Then I asked the question that was on my mind. "I wonder why he screamed like that on the way down? As far as he knew, he was jumping into a safety net."

Farley Dixon threw as much of a critical glance at Eloise as he could manage. "It was her," he said, and I could hear disapproval in his halting voice. "As soon as Murph stepped over the edge of the roof, she turned off the projector."

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Two of the most remarkable men of the Eighteenth Century were Dr. Sam: Johnson and Dr. Benjamin Franklin. It is a pity they never got together. This story supplies the omission.*

In December, 1776, when Franklin was at sea on his way to France, it would have taken only the onset of a contrary wind to blow him into Dr. Johnson's orbit. I have supplied that wind, and the fictitious meeting that followed.

Franklin was in fact very bitter against Johnson, on account of some remarks the latter had made in his anti-American pamphlet, "Taxation No Tyranny" (1775). If you should read that work (which nobody does any more), I think that you would perceive that in this Dr. Johnson was misunderstood. My story gives him a chance to explain himself, and ends with a better understanding between the two famous men.

Both Franklin and his endearing little grandson are sketched from life. The plot, of course, is made up out of the whole cloth.

THE SPIRIT OF THE '76

A Bicentennian Story
(as told by James Boswell, December, 1776)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

"Free and equal!" growled Dr. Sam: Johnson in high dudgeon. "All men, forsooth, created equal! What is to become of the proper order and subordination of society, if such frantick levelling doctrines are to prevail? Free and equal! Signed, John Hancock! Mark my words, sir, we shall yet see this fellow's head spiked above Temple Bar!"

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"Is he sole authour of this independent declaration?" I wondered, for secretly I admired it.

"No, sir. This treasonous manifesto comes, I am told, from the pen of a planter named Jefferson, aided and abetted by Benjamin Franklin."

"Dr. Franklin!" said I. "Now there's a head that would ill become Temple Bar. I dined in his company once, sir, some years since, and found him an agreeable companion, and moreover an ingenious contriver of devices to improve the lot of man, as his Pennsylvania fire place, his lightning rod, *et caetera*."

"I, too, Bozzy, have encountered the fellow. He was presiding at a meeting of benevolent gentlemen associated to provide education for the unfortunate Negroes of the New World. He then appeared to be a sincere friend to humanity, not at all addicted to republican phrenzy. Yet more's the pity, sir, he's a traitor to his King, and belongs on the scaffold with the rest of them!"

"Would you put him there?"

"Aye would I, and twenty such, let me but come in sight of them!"

"Which you are not like to do," I remarked. "They are safe on the other side of the water. Why should any of them put his head in the lion's mouth?"

"There you are out, sir, that same Franklin is now, they warn us, on the high seas, making for France—"

I doubted it not. Dr. Johnson had recently made his pen useful to the Ministry, and his sources of information were many.

"—so that we may hope that a tempest will drive him upon our shores, or a man-o'-war catch him and bring him hither."

I hoped not; but I said no more. As to the dispute with our fellow subjects across the sea, Dr. Johnson and I differed widely. Now that, with the Declaration of Independence, the breach had come, my friend was vehemently wishing success to our arms in putting down the insurgents; while, despite all, I wished them well, and desired they might all escape Jack Ketch.

This conversation took place in December of the year '76, in my philosophical friend's commodious dwelling in Bolt Court, Fleet Street. Tall, broad and bulky, in his full-skirted grey coat and broad stuff breeches, his little brown scratch-wig perched above his wide brow, he stood in the many-paned sash-window, looking down on the court. I felt once more a strong satisfaction that I, James Boswell, an advocate of North Britain thirty years his

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junior, was so often privileged to observe his proceedings as *detector* of crime and chicane. At that moment no problem engaged his massive intellect, unless the treason of America's rabid revolutionaries; but that situation was about to change.

As I stood at his shoulder looking down, a coach drew up with a jingle, and a lone woman descended, muffled in a dun-coloured capuchin. Another moment, and black Francis ushered her in to us. She burst into speech at once:

"Forgive my lack of ceremony, Dr. Johnson. Your goodness is known so widely, I make bold to beg you—the child is stolen away, Dr. Johnson! He's only seven, what am I to do?"

She choaked back a sob. Dr. Johnson took her slender hand and gently led her to the armed chair by the fire.

She was a small creature of a certain age, her soft face gently wrinkled, her grey hair pulled up in a plain pompadour above direct blue eyes now stained with tears.

"Be comforted, ma'am, we'll find him," said Dr. Johnson reassuringly; "but you must tell me all you know of the matter."

"I will try. I am Mrs. Stevenson—Margaret is my name. I dwell in Craven Street, Strand, and thence Benny has been spirited away."

"Your grandson, madam?"

"No, sir, but committed to my charge, and dearly loved."

"Perhaps he has wandered away?" I hazarded.

"No, sir, Benny was whipping his top before the door, when two men came by and carried him off. A servant saw from the window."

"Why did he not follow?"

"The wench is a she, and not over-bright. She formed the opinion that Benny was arrested by bailiffs, and knew not what was proper to do. I was from home, and only learned of the matter upon my return. What can they want of the boy? I have no money to buy him back."

"If he's to be bought back," remarked Dr. Sam: Johnson, "we shall soon hear. Meanwhile, let us look over the ground in Craven Street."

In the modest dwelling in Craven Street, the wench Katty was stubborn, being what Dr. Johnson is wont to denominate a "mule fool." She set her long jaw and stood to it. Master Benny was in the hands of the law. Time was wasted on her, before she remembered to say to her mistress:

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"And, ma'am, there's a billet handed in for the gentleman—"

Mrs. Stevenson seized it, scanned it, and extended it to my friend. At a sign, I moved to his elbow to share it with him.

Dear Doctor:

As you regard Benny, see that you present yourself at the Cat & Fiddle in Bow Street, this Day at five of the clock, & you shall hear further. Come alone. Fail us not, at Benny's Peril.

I am, Sir,
As you shall deal in this,
Your Friend

Dr. Johnson turned the missive in his strong, well-shaped fingers.

"Hm—paper of the best quality—a fair copying hand—this was never writ by a parcel of bum-bailiffs. Well, well, Mrs. Stevenson, I'll present myself as directed, to hear further as they promise. There is not long to wait."

"O sir, you'll never go alone!"

"I must, at Benny's peril. But Boswell shall be handy, in case of trickery."

Thus it was that before five of the clock I was approaching the Cat & Fiddle, alert to detect the miscreants we had come to meet. As I neared the lighted doorway in the foggy darkness, my eye fell on a tall, burly figure in the shadow. At first I thought it was Dr. Sam: Johnson himself in outlandish disguise, for the fellow was his replica in height and breadth. His powerful figure was enveloped in a vast coat of bull's hide, and a large fur cap was pulled down over his straggling grey locks. He wore a pair of cracked spectacles set in wire, and carried a porter's coil of rope. As I approached, he moved off, and I entered the Cat & Fiddle.

I was established on the fireside settle with a pint, when the door squeaked open, and a couple of rough-looking fellows made their appearance. Katty perhaps had not been so foolish, for sure enough they looked very like bum-bailiffs. Like bailiffs they took up their station on either side of the door. The potboy gave them a look, and discreetly vanished.

Another squeak, and Dr. Sam: Johnson stood in the doorway. He was wrapped in his large dark grey greatcoat, and his cocked hat was firmly tied down by a knitted scarf.

From left and right the two fellows closed in and seized him.

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"We arrest you," cried the smaller of the two triumphantly, "in the King's name!"

"Arrest me, ye boobies!" cried Dr. Johnson. "What call have you to arrest me? Everyone knows me: I am Dr. Johnson."

"O aye, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Brown, Dr. Robinson, 'tis all one. We know you, Doctor, right enough, you must come along with us."

"I'll come with you to the magistrate in Bow Street, and no further," growled Dr. Johnson.

"You're wanted elsewhere."

"What's the charge?"

The big one with the stupid face swelled up to proclaim it, but the ferret-nosed little one plucked his sleeve.

"Stubble your whids, Ned, 'ware rescue, we are not alone (jerking a gesture in my direction). There's a great price on this fellow's head. Do you want to share it?"

"Carry me before Sir John Fielding," insisted Dr. Johnson. "We'll see if there's a price on my head!"

They hustled him off. I set down my pot and followed. It was but a step along Bow Street to the Publick Office. Beside the doorway a lighted lanthorn flickered. As we approached, the catchpolls began to edge their captive away from the light, when Dr. Johnson with a powerful motion jerked suddenly from their grasp. Simultaniously the big pandour was pulled off his feet by the loop of a porter's rope.

Dr. Johnson collared the ferrety one and dragged him inside, leaving Ned *hors de combat* on the pavement, and the doughty old porter vanished. Another moment, and the three of us stood in the publick room before the magistrate.

Sir John Fielding, the famous Blind Beak of Bow Street, sat quietly in the magistrate's chair, a large, handsome personage with venerable white locks and a fold of black silk over his sightless eyes. He turned his ear as we entered, and spoke in an edged voice:

"What, is it you, Greentree? There's no missing that effluvium of dirty linen and gin. What miscreants have you brought me?"

"I've taken up a traitor, sir, is wanted at the Ministry."

"Sir John," said Dr. Johnson calmly, "the foolish fellow mistakes me for another."

Sir John, an old friend, knew the voice at once.

"Dr. Johnson, your servant! And where is Mr. Boswell? Not far away, I'll wager."

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"Right here, Sir John, at your service."

Waiving courtesies, Dr. Johnson at once adverted to the matter in hand.

"This Greentree," he said urgently, "baited me hither by stealing a child and sending this billet."

He began to read it out.

"I know nothing of your billet," muttered Greentree. "'Twas writ at the Ministry. I had only to nap the kid, which I did—arrest the Doctor when he broke cover, which I did—and fetch him to the Minister."

"What Doctor?"

"My Lord did not say."

"He gave you a warrant?"

"Well, no, sir, 'twas to be done in secret."

"Illegality upon illegality!" remarked Sir John. "Where is the child? Discover him, or you shall be the worse for it."

"In Water Lane," uttered the fellow grudgingly.

Instanter a posse of constables, with Greentree pinioned in their midst, conducted us to Water Lane. Our captive led us to a miserable hovel at the water's edge, where a slatternly harpy whined:

"Which I kept him secure as you bade me. He's locked in the loft that looks on the river. This way, gentlemen, you shall see he's safe enough."

The rusty key screeched in the lock, the door grated open. Dr. Johnson started forward; but save for a small pair of buckled shoes, the room was empty. The cracked casement swung on one hinge. We looked out in dismay on the brown waters of Thames. Had the child been done away with in this lair?

Sir John's men took up the cursing woman, and bore her with Greentree off to the roundhouse, there to be sifted further. We were left to make our way back to Craven Street with news of our failure.

With heavy hearts we mounted the slope. I liked the neighbourhood ill. Fleet Ditch stank. Ragamuffins prowled or slept in doorways. Trulls loitered, and bullies swaggered. Once I thought I glimpsed the burly old porter with his rope, but then he was gone again in the darkness.

As the street rose, out of the foggy dark one more ragamuffin appeared. This one approached us confidently, a sandy-haired, solid-built little boy, shoeless and dripping wet. As we paused, he recited in a clear voice:

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"Please, sir, my name is Benjamin Franklin Bache, I dwell at Craven Street in the Strand. My new Granny is Mrs. Stevenson. Will you take me to her?"

"What, boy, did you say Benjamin Franklin?"

"He is my grandfather."

"Well, well, Bozzy, it appears there is more in this than meets the eye. Where is your grandfather, boy?"

"In Craven Street, sir."

"Then," said Dr. Johnson, "in the King's name, on to Craven Street!"

We wrapped the shivering child in my waistcoat, and set a brisk pace. As he trotted along between us, he readily told what had befallen him.

"The men, they said they were officers of police, and I must come along. I didn't like them. I misliked the old witch too. I waited and waited for my grandfather to come. I was hungry and cold, and I went away from there."

"Went away! How?"

"Through the window, sir."

"In the *water*?" I ejaculated, dumfounded, since I cannot swim a stroak. "What, little boy, can you swim?"

"My grandfather," said the child with pride, "is the greatest swimmer in the world, and he taught me. 'Twas but a few stroaks to the nearest water stair."

"I can swim further than that," the small voice chattered on. "When the sloop was like to founder in the storm, my grandfather bade me fear nothing, we could swim for it. But the *Reprisal* made her way to shore at Hoy Cove, and as soon as the Westcombe men have put her to rights, we'll away to France."

"Will you so, my boy?" said Dr. Johnson drily.

"Yes, indeed, sir. —I'm sleepy," he added with a prodigious yawn, and fell silent.

We arrived at Craven Street without further parley. Mrs. Stevenson fell on the child with transport, but Dr. Johnson held him fast.

"I claim the privilege," he said, "of restoring Dr. Franklin's grandson to his arms myself."

Mrs. Stevenson looked affrighted, but could not gainsay him. She ushered us to the two-pair-of-stairs parlour.

"Benny!" The sturdy old gentleman by the fire held out his arms, and the boy flew into them.

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I stared. Gone were the bull's-hide coat and the porter's rope; but the fur cap and the spectacles remained to tell us that the old fellow who had dogged us on our errand was none other than Dr. Franklin himself. I scanned the cheerful lined face. It was a face that had mellowed with the years, not handsome, but winning with its look of pleased surprise, as if perpetually astonished and gratified by the spectacle of the world in its infinite variety. The hazel eyes sparkled with a penetrating intelligence. Over the boy's tawny curls, the brilliant gaze turned to us.

"Dr. Johnson, I believe?"

"Your servant, Dr. Franklin."

"I am your debtor, sir," said Franklin stiffly, "little as I desire it. I regret that Margaret was so impulsive as to call upon your aid."

"Ben!" cried Mrs. Stevenson softly, "we are much in Dr. Johnson's debt for his efforts!"

"Dr. Franklin knows," observed Dr. Johnson, "for he trusted me so little. He dogged my every move in guise of a street porter."

"Trust?" exclaimed Franklin. "Why would I trust a man who wrote against us and counselled the Ministry to set upon us the Red Men and the Blacks?"

"You misread me, sir," said Johnson calmly. "True, I would give the Blacks their freedom, with means of sustenance and defence; from which, if memory serves, you yourself are not averse. And as to the raids of the Red Men, what else can you expect, if you renounce the protection of British arms?"

"The protection of British arms!" echoed Franklin bitterly. "It was British arms that shot down innocent people in the Boston Massacre!"

"We all deplore it, sir," conceded Johnson.

Franklin set down the boy from his lap.

"Make your bow, Benny, and go now with Granny."

The mannerly boy inclined solemnly to each of us, and left us. As Dr. Franklin turned to us with an air of dismissal, a newcomer erupted into the room. From the tall form, the long dark face, the Satanick quirk of the black eyebrows, I recognised him with mixed emotions. It was Sir Francis Flashwood, he who raised the Devil in the caves under Hoy Head, whose witching daughter I had once thought to woo, whose Coven we had quelled at Westcombe in the '68 (all which I have set forth at large in my account of "The Westcombe Witch").

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We had heard of that gentleman's doings since then, how with his close friend Benjamin Franklin he had "reformed" the Prayer Book—Satan rebuking sin?—how as Lord LeSpenser he had gone into politicks, acting as Postmaster General to such effect that he was now respectable, and the Westcombe Blacks were heard of no more.

Now he paid us not the slightest heed, but rushed to Franklin crying:

"Up, Ben, there's not a minute to waste! There's a plot against you at the Ministry. I have it on the surest advices. Since you are too elusive to be caught, they will lay hands on Benny, and so force you to come in, to who knows what fate—"

"Why, Francis," said Franklin calmly, "I thank you, but your warning is belated—"

"What, they have him?"

"No, no, dear friend, the attempt has been made, but it has been frustrated by Dr. Johnson here."

For the first time my Lord's eyes focussed upon us where we stood by the fire.

"Dr. Johnson," he said wryly. "Yes, a notable frustrater. And Mr. Boswell too. How do you, Sir Brimstone of Tophet?"

"Well, I thank you, sir," said I, grandly ignoring this allusion to my diabolical misadventures in the caves at Westcombe, "and how does your lovely daughter, Miss Fan?"

"Fan is wed to her cousin Talley. She lives in the West Country and raises a numerous progeny. But there's no time for gossip. Dr. Franklin is in the gravest danger. O Ben, Ben, you might have been safe at Westcombe, why would you insist on coming up to London?"

"Money, business, and love," smiled Franklin, "what other human motives are there? To fetch the gold intended for the cause, to recover my papers, and to see once more my dear Mistress Margaret."

"Let us hope your recklessness will not cost you all three, and life besides. We must depart for Westcombe with all speed. My travelling coach stands waiting at the door, and the men of the Westcombe Blacks are a-horse and ready to escort us."

"A desperate set of men," remarked Dr. Johnson. "I had thought them won over to the side of the law."

"Well, sir," Sir Francis smiled thinly, "not entirely, when my friend's life is at stake. For him they'll do their utmost. And you,

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Dr. Johnson, what will you do for us? The issue now is greater than a few French bales. Will you keep silence?"

Johnson said nothing, and I struck in:

"You have *my* parole, sir. I wish the Americans only good."

"Then you may go, Mr. Boswell."

"Not if Dr. Johnson remains."

"He remains," said Sir Francis emphatically. "We cannot have him running to Lord North behind our backs."

"Tut, sir, I told you once, I am no catchpoll."

"And I believe you, Dr. Johnson," said Franklin quietly.

"No, Ben, we cannot risk it. He shall go with us to Westcombe."

I started forward to protest, but Dr. Johnson shook his head at me. I shrugged, and composed myself for the journey.

Now all was bustle. Papers were bagged, portmanteaus slammed shut, hampers filled with viands. Benny, dried off and warmly cloathed anew, was swathed in shawls and tucked in a corner of the travelling carriage, where he promptly fell asleep. In the hurly-burly, we might easily enough have slipped away, but Dr. Johnson unaccountably sat on in smiling calm.

Soon we stood at the door bidding adieu. Franklin took little Margaret Stevenson warmly in his arms, and embraced her tenderly.

"Farewell once more, my dear, and once more, thanks for years together of sunshine without cloud. Let us be grateful to the storm which blew me hither and allowed us to meet for one more time; and if we never meet again, remember me."

We left her weeping in the doorway as we rolled off into the night. The dark-clad figures of the Westcombe Blacks closed in about us with silent hooves, and so we trotted briskly out of town and took the road towards the sea. No spies dogged us. The misadventure of Benny had clearly put the Ministry forces in disarray. If we could only get clear before they rallied!

It was a long way to go, to the harbour at Westcombe, where lay the *Reprisal,* refitted now and ready to slip her cable for France. The Westcombe Blacks had smoothed our way. Fresh horses awaited us at posting-houses, where we could refresh while the ostlers bustled, and the Westcombe men waited upon us—and watched us—attentively.

At first we rode together in stiff silence, which merged into sleep as exhausted nature claimed her due.

The day dawned sunny. We explored the contents of the ham-

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pers, and then sat back invigorated. The coach was new and commodious, smelling of leather and horseflesh and creaking lightly on easy springs. I regarded my companions. Sir Francis, clad in a bottle-green cloak with multiple capes, lounged in his corner, his watchful dark eyes fixed on Dr. Johnson; who, for his part, sat complaisantly smiling with the pleasure he always derived from the swift motion of a carriage.

Dr. Franklin in his snuff-coloured greatcoat wore neither wig nor hat, but that same fur cap, like a brown bee-hive, pulled down almost to his spectacles; through the round panes of which, he drank in the passing prospect. Next him sat small Benny, emerged from his cocoon. In the smiling quirk of his small upper lip and the brilliance of his eyes, the resemblance to his grandfather was strong.

It was impossible we should continue in sullen silence. My companions were men of wit and ingenuity, and had much to say to one another if it could but be brought out. And who should bring it out better than your humble servant, James Boswell? If I had been able to reconcile my stern friend to that devil Jack Wilkes—as I recently had done—it would go hard but I would bring Johnson and Franklin together.

Warmed by my breakfast glass, I first undertook to kindle the atmosphere with one of my own songs. I considered the bawdy strophes of "Gunter's Chain": Sir Francis would certainly relish it, and Dr. Franklin with his almost-smiling mouth looked receptive. But I glanced at the lofty countenance of my moral mentor, and instead trolled out a stave of my ditty celebrating "Currant Jelly." Franklin then reciprocated with a convivial drinking song of his own composition, writ, he said, some thirty years since, in praise of friendship and wine. His voice was husky, but true.

"Then toss off your glasses and scorn the dull asses
Who missing the kernel still gnaw the shell.
What's love, rule, or riches? Wise Solomon teaches
They're vanity, vanity, vanity still,
For honest souls know
Friend and a bottle still bear the bell."

"On this we can all agree," I exclaimed, "for Dr. Johnson is wont to bid us, 'Keep your friendships in repair'."

"And in my country," replied Dr. Franklin, "the Red Indians have a saying, 'Keep the chain of friendship bright'."

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"What, has Benny no song to sing?" prompted Flashwood, smiling at the bright-eyed little boy.

At this Benny shrilled out a jolly jig tune entitled "Yankee Doodle."

"Father and I went down to camp
Along with Cap'n Good'in,
And there we saw the men and boys
As thick as hasty puddin'.
Yankee Doodle, keep it up,
Yankee Doodle Dandy,
Mind the musick and the step
And with the girls be handy!"

"With the girls!" repeated Dr. Johnson, unable to repress a smile. "A precocious Yankee Dandy, Benny, indeed!"

Encouraged by my friend's smiling regard, Benny prattled on in his small high tones:

"I shall go to school in France," he told Dr. Johnson proudly, "and when we have won the war—"

"Won, my boy?"

"Yes, sir, of course we shall win." The clear voice rang out. "We'll fight the redcoats on the beaches, in the streets, if need be in the wilderness: and thereto we have pledged our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour!"

"Why," said Dr. Johnson, still smiling, "what an eloquent young rebel it is!"

"An eloquent young parrot," observed my Lord. "That last flourish, if memory serves, was writ by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia."

"With the assistance," added the American, "of Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania."

"And such," concluded Flashwood, "is the spirit of the '76!"

"Cant!" muttered Johnson, and I hastily turned the subject.

"Pray, Dr. Franklin, what projects have you to the fore for the good of mankind?"

The smile that touched his lip deepened, and for a moment I thought he would say "Freedom!" Instead he replied civilly:

"Why, sir, I have newly made observations on the Gulf Stream, on the Aurora Borealis, and on further improvements in opticks."

"There, sir, I heartily wish you success," said Dr. Johnson, "for my eyes serve me ill, and I have found no spectacles by which I can both read and view the world about me. I have wondered

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whether one might not be able to combine the two functions by joining two pieces of glass into one pane, the lower for reading, the upper for looking afar."

"Why, sir," replied Franklin, smiling, "not only can it be done, I have done it: as you may see by the spectacles I wear."

He took them off and handed them over. Johnson brought them up close to his near-sighted eyes and examined them attentively. I saw now that what I had hastily, in the half light of Bow Street, taken for cracks, were really the lines where two half circles joined.

"Ingenious!" said Dr. Johnson, and put them to his eyes. After a moment he handed them back, shaking his head regretfully.

"They will not serve my turn."

"Of course not," said Franklin, "each double pane must be suited to the eye that wears it. Well, sir, when I come to France—if I am so fortunate—I purpose to set the lens-makers to work. If all goes well, you shall hear of this further."

Chatting thus of matters scientifick, we passed the rest of the morning in amity.

"You were right, Bozzy," said my friend in my ear at the next posting-house, "that's too well-furnished a head to let the Ministry have it to adorn Temple Bar!"

The sun was well past the meridian when with a sense of relief we rolled in to the village of Westcombe. There we turned in at the Admiral's Head, that our voyagers might recruit before going aboard the *Reprisal*. The master shipwright awaited us with the welcome news that she rode well and was ready for sea. His men at once carried off the baggage while we took a glass.

A sound of hooves thudding our way in hot haste broke our complacency, and a breathless youth flung into our presence.

"The redcoats, my Lord!" he cried. "We have been betrayed! Some one has given the word at Carnock Castle, and the troopers are riding this way to apprehend us. They cannot be ten minutes behind me!"

"Keep watch, Gannett!" commanded Sir Francis. "Up, Ben, we'll go by the caves. That way it is but two minutes to safety!"

I remembered the caves of Westcombe with their secret passage to the harbour, and took heart. But almost at once Gannett was back in the room, crying:

"They're coming, my Lord, they are at the top of the street. We are all trapped!"

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Dr. Sam: Johnson rose resolutely to his feet.

"Not yet. Give me a horse, and I'll draw them off."

"*You,* Dr. Johnson," exclaimed Franklin, "you'll do so much for America?"

"Let us say I'll do it for Benny. Quickly, Doctor, here's a wig in exchange for your fur hat, and a grey coat for your brown one—"

The exchange was made, and most convincing it appeared, for the two tall, burly old men, tho' unlike in face, were of an age, and much alike in figure and bearing.

With the briefest of farewells we took horse in the inn yard; the gates were opened; we set spur and dashed into the street. Not a hundred yards away we perceived the redcoats trotting our way with a measured jingle of harness. Johnson wheeled his horse with a roar, and with incredulity I heard the words that he roared:

"Long live the United States of America!"

"Hold your fire!" cried the officer in the lead. "After him, for he's to be taken alive!"

In this coil it was well that in the '68 we had learned to know the ways of Westcombe. By a byway we left the town, and galloped away over the down.

Dr. Johnson always said he rode harder at a fox-chace than anybody, and he rode harder now. Had I not been mounted on as swift a horse, and riding lighter in the saddle, I could not have kept pace with him. As it was, too soon our mounts were blown, and the soldiers cornered us in a fold of the hills.

"Benjamin Franklin," cried the lanky young officer, "I arrest you on a charge of high treason! And your accomplice too," he added with a jerk of his head towards me.

"Whither do you carry us?" I demanded.

"To London, sir, with all speed."

Johnson said nothing. The less he said, in his Litchfield accent, the less would our captors suspect trickery; and the longer we went unsuspected, the better the *Reprisal*'s chances of making good her escape to France. The soldiers closed in, and so we began the weary way back to London.

As we crossed the brow of the hill, we glimpsed the blue of the bay, and the schooner with all sails set standing out to sea for France. I sent a wordless wish after it: Success to your mission!

The return journey seemed interminable; but at last we entered

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London Town. Whither would our captors lead us now? Bow Street, Newgate Prison, the Tower? Had we seen the last of the sun?

Instead, the young lieutenant set our course for the fashionable end of the town, and drew rein before a handsome house in Grosvenor Square. Stiffly we dismounted and followed our guide within. Knocking, he flung wide a door, and announced with a flourish:

"My Lord, I have the honour to present—Dr. Benjamin Franklin!"

A man with a star on his coat rose smiling from a marquetry writing table. By his florid face and prominent eyes, for one thunderstruck moment I thought him the King. Then I knew him for Lord North, the King's first Minister, about whose resemblance to his King courtiers talked behind their hands.

"My Lord!" Dr. Johnson, who always prided himself on paying a nobleman the ceremony due him, removed the fur bee-hive and executed a stately bow. My Lord started, and peered close. The smile dissolved in a frown.

"What nonsense is this, Leftenant? This man is not Dr. Franklin, but Dr. Sam: Johnson, to whom I am indebted for political pamphleteering. By G-d, I am ill served by clodpates! Leave us, fellow! (The crestfallen soldier withdrew.) And you, Dr. Johnson? What do you here in a rebel's coat? Have you turned your coat in earnest?"

Dr. Johnson glowered. Tho' he upheld my Lord's politicks, he despised his person.

"I am no turncoat, my Lord," he replied sturdily. "I reprehend rebellion as much as ever I did. Yet when a man is to be secretly trepanned—and that man a benefactor of mankind—without colour of law, at the expense of a child, and for what clandestine purpose? Secret assassination, perhaps?"

"Not so!" cried North, stung, but Johnson swept on:

"Then I shall do what I can to save my country from such infamy. If my company can protect, no matter how, my company shall be afforded."

"That explains," I cried, enlightened, "why you submitted—"

Johnson gave me a look which silenced me, and continued coolly:

"The Leftenant's mistake has given me much fatigue, my Lord; I beg leave to withdraw."

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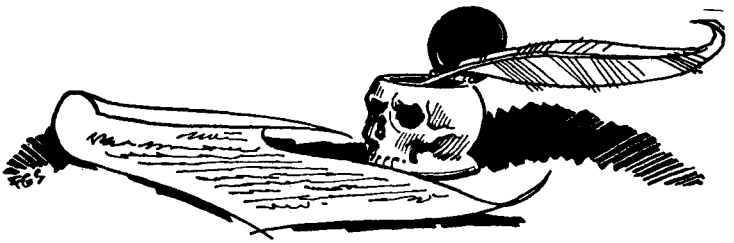
Would leave be granted? In a swift vision I again saw the Tower and the scaffold before me. Then my Lord smiled coldly.

"As you perceive, Dr. Johnson, this transaction, were it known, would make my Ministry a byword and a laughing-stock. You have leave to depart; and see that you both hold your tongues."

"Yours to command, my Lord. But give me leave to tell you, after hours spent in company with the American and his grandson, I can prophesy the end. For determination, bravery and ingenuity, the Americans have never seen their match, and I fear your Lordship will find it difficult to prevail against the spirit of the '76!"



CRIMINALIMERICK

QUICK, BOSWELL, THE NEEDLE!

by D. R. BENSEN

Though his mind Sam: Johnson has lots on,
Show him crime and its solving he plots on;
But as he detects,
He never suspects
At his side there's the very first Watson.

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a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA CALLAHAN

Barbara Callahan's new story deals with a phenomenon of modern life—a phenomenon in which literally millions of people are involved five days every week, a phenomenon that reveals the fine line between fancy and fact, between make-believe and reality... In Ambrose Bierce's words, "Can such things be?" They can, dear reader, they can indeed...

TO BE CONTINUED

by BARBARA CALLAHAN

I wept when Jason Carruthers told Amanda Armstrong the real reason he couldn't marry her. It was the most moving scene I had ever watched on the daytime TV serial, "To Live and To Love."

He put his arms around her and said that his love for her almost consumed him. Then he revealed that years ago he had fathered a child, a baby girl. He and the baby's mother had been forbidden by their parents to marry. The baby had been given out for adoption.

There were tears in Jason's eyes as he explained to Amanda that he must find his child before he could marry her and burden her with his great sorrow. His first wife had divorced him because of his anguish over his unknown child. She felt that Jason loved the child more than he did her. But then Cecily, Jason's first wife, was irrational. I disliked her for the entire two years she was on the show.

When Jason asked Amanda to wait for him until he had found his daughter, she sobbed and nodded yes. I knew Amanda would wait. She has character.

After I turned off the TV set, I went to the sofa and sat there thinking quietly for a long time. The only sounds that penetrated

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my reverie were the beating of my heart and the jubilant howling of the March winds outside my window.

"You've found your father, you've found your father," the winds sang.

I opened the window to admit the winds to the living room. They tumbled in like exuberant children, upsetting the vase on the coffee table and knocking over the picture of mother, father, and me. The glass covering the picture shattered, but I didn't care. The part of my life represented in that photograph had ended. Those two people were my adoptive parents. For years I had wondered who my real parents were. After watching "To Live and To Love," one-half of the deepest mystery of my life was solved.

I knew now who my father was. Jason Carruthers was my father. That's why the winds sang "You've found your father" to me. The winds always understood how much I yearned to know him. I could never talk to anyone about my feelings for my real parents. My adoptive parents became sad whenever I talked about my real father and mother. They thought I didn't love them. I did, but the love I felt did not eliminate my need to know who I belonged to. When I sat on the hill behind our house, I had to confide in the winds.

Dear friends, I told them, as they whirled around the living room, tell Jason Carruthers that I am coming to him. Tell him that the words he spoke to Amanda about his daughter apply to me. Jason said his daughter was born 19 years ago in New Jersey. She was cared for by a religious social agency until she was three months old. Then she was adopted.

I was born in New Jersey 19 years ago. I was cared for by a religious social agency for three months before being adopted. That's all I was ever told.

The star of "To Live and To Love" had to be my father. Not only did his daughter's background match mine, but his appearance was similar to mine. He was tall and thin the way I am. He had dark brown eyes and dark brown hair the way I have.

It was imperative that I go to New York immediately. I must reach Jason before he set off on his quest for his daughter. When I found him, we would search for my mother together. It would be easy to find her because Jason had a picture of her in his wallet. He showed it to Amanda Armstrong.

My adoptive parents were at work. I considered leaving a note for them, but I decided not to. If I told them that I had found my

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real father on "To Live and To Love," they would send the police after me. They were always telling me that I took daytime serials too seriously. They were upset with me when I spent $25 to send flowers to Melissa Oliver, one of the stars of "The Dawning of Day," after she had her baby. They didn't understand that it was important for me to send flowers to Melissa because she had decided to keep her baby and not put her up for adoption.

After I packed my bag, I suddenly became frightened. I prodded my mind for the reason and remembered what my adoptive father had said about New York. Muggers, he had said, the city was full of muggers. I went to his bureau drawer and took the gun he kept there. The gun would protect me.

I slid the gun into my pocketbook. I shooed the winds out of the living room and closed the window behind them. They had had a real frolic in there. Picking up the picture of my adoptive parents, I noticed a copy of "Daytime TV" on the floor. After I swept up the glass I put the magazine in my handbag. There was a picture of Jason in it and I wanted him with me.

As I closed the door behind me, I felt a sense of loss. I quickly shook it off because I knew Jason would always let me visit my adoptive parents. They had been good to me.

My business at the bank went smoothly. I withdrew all my savings, which amounted to $300. I told the teller I was taking a trip. Then I took a cab to the bus station.

On the bus I had plenty of time to make my plans. I decided to check into a YWCA to conserve money. Then I planned to make the rounds of private detective agencies. I was sure Jason would have hired one to search for his daughter, for me.

During the last few miles of the ride I settled back against the headrest and closed my eyes. The image of Jason and me embracing in the swanky office of a private detective agency filled my heart with joy.

It was so wonderful to be able to put a face into the warm scene of the father-daughter meeting I had dreamed of so many times. I always pictured my father as tall and dark-haired, but his face was always blurry. The scene had become such a part of my life that because of it I lost my job as a file clerk in an insurance company. My boss told me that she could do without an employee who stared into space so much of the time.

During my first week in New York City I learned two things—that $300 did not last long, and that there were many, many pri-

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vate detective agencies.

The usual reply to my question about their being hired by Jason Carruthers was a frosty: "We do not give out the names of our clients." Only once did a receptionist say something different.

"Jason Carruthers," she said, "that name is sure familiar. Isn't there a guy by that name on 'To Live and To Love'? I watch it on my lunch hour. If you're looking for him, honey, you'd better go tripping down the yellow brick road."

She laughed at the joke she thought she had made. When Jason would have me appear with him on "To Live and To Love," she would regret her poor attempt at humor.

When my rounds of detective agencies proved fruitless, there was only one thing left for me to do. I remembered that the restaurant where Jason was photographed for the magazine was called Sardi's. For three days in a row I went there for lunch, hoping that he would stop there for a rest from his efforts in finding me. On the fourth day I was rewarded.

He came into the restaurant with a man. I scarcely breathed as they took seats not far from me. I ordered dessert so that I could stay longer and watch them, but I was too excited to eat it. I could only stare at his handsome face. But Jason looked tired and somewhat older than he did on TV. The strain of searching for me must be affecting him.

After they had finished their lunch, I followed them outside, standing only a few feet away when Jason said goodbye to his friend. As Jason walked to the curb, I hurried up behind him. I touched his arm when he raised it to flag a cab. He spun around and looked angrily at me. Smiling, I savored the irony of the moment I had long awaited. We would laugh afterwards about his initial reaction to me. The brown eyes that Amanda Armstrong had found so irresistible flashed at me.

"I lost that cab because of you," he complained.

"You lost that cab, but you found something more important," I answered.

"Yes," he sighed, "I guess I did. I found a fan. I find them everywhere."

He put his hand into his overcoat pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. He wrote something on it and handed it to me.

It said: *Best wishes, Avery Wilson.*

He started back to the curb. I dropped the autograph with the strange name on it into my pocketbook. My hand brushed against

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the gun I had brought to New York to protect me from muggers. I took it out. Jason was leaning over to open the back door of a cab when I put the gun against his back. I hated to do that, but it was the only thing I could think of to keep him from riding away from me.

His body jerked forward as if it had been stabbed. Turning halfway around, his eyes focused on the gun in my hand. This time his brown eyes showed terror instead of anger. I motioned him into the cab. Unresisting, he slid onto the seat. Gently I pushed him over toward the farther door as I climbed in beside him. I covered the gun with my pocketbook.

"Where to, Mister?" asked the cabbie.

Jason said nothing.

"Central Park," I told the driver.

I felt sorry for Jason. His hands were clasped so tightly together on his lap that I could see a tiny white arc on each knuckle. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead. He seemed to be swallowing a lot.

But it was impossible for me to tell him who I was in the cab. I didn't want the driver to intrude on our meeting. The scene I had so lovingly imagined to myself all those years did not include an onlooker.

Once, when we stopped for a traffic light, Jason unclasped his hands and put one on the door handle. I lifted the pocketbook off my gun. He locked his hands together again.

When we reached the park, Jason paid the driver before I could get my wallet out. He gave him a ten-dollar bill. The driver beamed when Jason told him to keep the change. Jason kept staring at the driver. I read the message his eyes were trying to send to the man. His eyes were signaling: *Help me.* The cabbie was too busy stuffing the bill into his pocket to notice his fare's silent pleading.

I had to nudge Jason with the gun to get him to open the door to the sidewalk. I was beginning to feel bad. Nothing was happening like the scene I had pictured over the drawers of the filing cabinet.

Walking into the park, I felt a little better. The ugly charade I had had to play would soon be over. A park was the perfect setting for a father-daughter introduction. My steps became springy, but Jason's were slow and shuffly. Once he stopped to stare hard at a forsythia bush that swayed and bobbed under the pounding of

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the winds. It was good to see the winds at work. They had followed me, their friend, to rejoice at my happiness. They were trying so hard to help me that they toyed with Jason's hair. Their teasing did not soften the set lines of his face, so they shifted their jabbings to his eyes. Those winds actually made his eyes water.

Jason continued staring at the bush as if it were the loveliest thing on earth. I had to poke him again with the gun to make him move. As we walked I looked up at him. He suddenly seemed very old. The wrinkles around his eyes had become furrows moistened by the tears the March winds had coaxed from his eyes. Walking seemed to be an exertion for him, so I glanced around and saw a bench sheltered from the winds, only a few feet away. Nobody was sitting there. I poked Jason again and he quickened his steps to keep up with me. I pointed to the bench. When he sat down, he didn't look at me.

In the father-daughter scene in my mind I had always been standing, so I remained that way. Sometimes in my scene my father was running toward me. I backed up a little so that Jason could spring joyously to me when I told him who I was.

"I'm sorry it has to be this way," I began, but I couldn't continue because Jason choked out something that sounded like "Oh, God." Then he covered his face with his hands. I realized that he must have thought my words were a prologue to using the gun.

"What I meant to say was that I'm sorry I had to use a gun to get you to talk to me. You were going to leave me and I had to stop you. Jason, I am not just a fan. I am your daughter, the one you told Amanda Armstrong about. I am the child you have been longing for."

Jason dropped his hands into his lap and stared at me. He was too overcome by emotion to speak.

"Well, aren't you going to say something?" I asked.

He cleared his throat. "If you'll put that gun over there by that tree, I'll talk to you."

"Of course," I answered.

As I walked to the tree, I turned around to look at Jason. He hadn't moved. I was so happy that I almost skipped back to the bench.

"Sit down," he said.

"Yes, Father," I replied.

He looked at me as intently as he had at Amanda Armstrong.

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"Listen carefully to what I am going to say. I am not your father. In fact, I am not Jason Carruthers. My name is Avery Wilson and I'm an actor who portrays a character on a television serial. The story of Jason's search for his daughter is only a story. Do you understand?"

I laughed. "I know what you're doing," I told him. "You're testing me. You want to be sure that I'm the right person. I'll show you my voter registration card with my age and address on it. You'll see that I'm nineteen and that I live in New Jersey. I'm the same age and I live in the same area as your daughter. I *am* your daughter."

He sighed. "You've evidently been under a great strain. Come with me and I'll take you to a doctor."

I jumped off the bench. "I'm tired of people saying that I need a doctor, Jason. So tired of it. Give me your wallet."

He reached into his pocket. "If it's money you want, I'll be glad to give it to you."

When I grabbed the wallet from him, my fingernail scratched his hand and drew blood from his pale skin. I wasn't sorry about that. He deserved the scratch for spoiling the scene I had so lovingly tuned into all those years.

"I don't want money, Jason," I said. "I want to see the photograph of my mother that you carry in your wallet, the one you showed to Amanda Armstrong. I am tall and slender like you, but my face doesn't resemble yours. I must look like my mother."

Quickly I flipped through all the photographs in his wallet. She wasn't there. I pulled out all the credit cards and money. There was no photograph of my mother wedged in with them. I tore the snapshots out of their windows, thinking her photo might be underneath another photo. She wasn't there.

The photographs in the wallet were all of the same person, the man who had lunched with Jason at Sardi's. There were all sorts of photos of him—on a beach, on a sofa, in a swimming pool. There was even a photograph of him with Jason. They were wearing Mexican hats and standing in front of a fountain. Jason had his arm around the man. They were both smiling.

"What have you done with her picture?" I shouted.

"There was never a photograph of her in my wallet, only in the wallet I use when I play Jason Carruthers on 'To Live and To Love'."

"Stop saying that you *play* Jason Carruthers. You *are* Jason

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Carruthers. You've been looking for your daughter all week. You haven't been on the show."

He shook his head. "I've been making a commercial all week. That's why I've been off the show."

Everything was wrong, all wrong. Not once in the scenes I had pictured did my father ever deny me. Why was Jason doing this? He told Amanda he wanted to find his daughter and there I was sitting on a park bench beside him, sobbing. Why wouldn't he believe me?

"Don't cry," he said gently.

"I'm not crying," I said. "These March winds are tearing at my eyes just as you are tearing at my heart."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "You must understand this. I am nobody's father. The photos you've seen in my wallet are of the man with whom I've shared my life for twenty years. There was never anyone else. Can't you understand that?"

Of course I could understand that. I understood exactly what he was doing. He was making up a story for me just as he had once made up a story to prevent my mother from marrying him. He was a man who couldn't accept responsibility. He had a ready-made excuse to keep from getting involved with someone. My adoptive parents had told me that discovering the truth about my origins might be painful. They were right.

"You can leave now," I told him, thinking that those words must have been the same as those my mother had spoken to him years ago.

I watched him walk away. He started out slowly but when he reached the forsythia bush he began to run. Run, I thought, run! Run away from me as you did from my mother. Run from the truth. Run as fast as you can to the nearest policeman. Tell him to come back here to the lunatic in the park. Tell the policeman to come back with his gun drawn.

My gun. I had almost forgotten it. I ran to the tree and lifted it from its cradle within the roots that were as interlocked as Jason's hands had been in the cab.

Thinking about Jason's hands made me cry. I ran from the park, from the setting of the father-daughter scene that had been so cruel. I wanted to get as far away from the park as I could. I jumped on a bus and stayed on it for a long time, until I tired of all the stopping and starting. I got off at a corner next to a department store. I wanted to walk and walk, but those treacherous

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March winds, no longer my friends, were following me, laughing at me, tearing at me. Those winds knew my dream had been shattered. They knew it and they rejoiced over it. I had to get away from them.

I went into the store and walked all over the first floor, and then the second. When I reached the third floor, I saw Jason smiling at me. He was self-assured, with no beads of perspiration on his forehead. He was saying something to me. I had to walk closer to hear what he said. He was telling me what to take for acid indigestion.

The utter insensitivity of that man! He was acting as if the agony he had caused me could be bubbled away by a seltzer tablet. It was not my stomach that ached, it was my heart.

My hand trembled as I pulled out the gun. It steadied when I aimed it directly at his smile. Then glass shattered, a puff of smoke billowed into the air, and people screamed.

"She shot the TV set!" I heard a woman shout.

I dropped the gun and walked to the escalator. I felt so much better than I had when I came into the store, until a man with vise-like hands grabbed me.

They call the place where they took me a hospital, but I never before saw a hospital with bars on the windows. The bars don't bother me as much as the sounds in here. They are ugly sounds, sounds of doors banging, keys jangling, footsteps clattering, people moaning. I have difficulty hearing the TV set in the recreation room. I've asked my adoptive parents to send me my own TV for my room, but they won't do it. They say that I'm better off without a TV set. They say that TV was the triggering mechanism for my problem.

The people in group therapy with me say that I am making progress. When I admitted to them last week that I realized Jason wasn't my real father, they all cheered. One of the shyest in the group patted me on the arm. She hates to touch anyone or have anyone touch her, so I guess my admission helped her with her problem. The nurse who leads our sessions says therapy enables us to help each other.

Helping others is very satisfying. I'm going to continue helping others when I get out of here. I hope I leave soon because I know the ones I must help. When I watch "To Live and To Love" here after Crafts in the recreation room, I shiver when I hear everyone

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happily discussing Jason and Amanda's forthcoming marriage. It seems that Jason was unsuccessful in finding his daughter and he's given up trying. He and Amanda are going to be married in a few weeks.

Amanda needs my help. She must be told that Jason does not really love her. As painful as it will be for her, I must insist that she look at the photographs in Jason's wallet, the wallet he doesn't use on the show. I hope I can find her at the TV studio. I hope when I do that she doesn't try to run away before I can speak to her. I hope I won't have to get another gun to make her listen to me.

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a *NEW* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Mitch Taylor was finally assigned to the case, a combination of breaking and entering, grand larceny, and assault and battery on a big-shot millionaire. It was Mitch's kind of a case, all mixed up with his personal problems and Lieutenant Decker's grandson's birthday party. And it all went according to Hoyle—almost. . .

C AS IN CROOKED

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Like Mitch Taylor told himself, it would have been just a routine larceny case, with no complications, no homicide, except for two things.

First off, he'd promised Amy he'd get home in time to take care of the kids, on account she had a dental appointment. He figured he'd cook up some hamburgers and they'd think their old man was a pretty good chef. Which he wasn't, although every once in a while he kind of liked to do a chore or two in the kitchen. Nothing fancy. He could boil an egg or heat up a can of beans, and even follow directions on a package of frozen stuff. And Amy always washed up, of course.

The second thing was this kid. He was Lieutenant Decker's grandson and he was six years old and having a birthday party. None of which sounded like it had much to do with a millionaire named Jesse Childers or an ex-stripteaser named Honey-Jane. Still, funny things can happen, and usually do.

The background Mitch got was, this Childers was a big-shot real-estate operator and he was off in the Bahamas for the winter, only a big deal came up so he had to go back to his office. And while he was staying at his club and making an extra million or two, he went up to his house one evening to make sure everything was okay. He walked into the place and got slugged.

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Maybe.

Mitch wasn't exactly sure why he didn't swallow the story like Eddy Huff did. Eddy was a grade B detective up there on the goldcoast where it happened, and Eddy investigated. His report said some bum must have broken into the place and been sleeping there when Childers walked in on him. So the bum let him have it, and then took off.

If Mitch had been in Eddy Huff's shoes, he would have done pretty much the same thing as Eddy—taken a look at the place and made out an ID-2 report: trespass by person or persons unknown. Which would have been enough for most anybody except Childers.

But a character like Childers, somebody steps on their toes in a crowd, and they claim it's an assault and battery and they want the whole police department to go on a moratorium while they find out who did it. So Childers had lunch with the Commissioner and threw his weight around, and the department had to come up with something. Mitch got the assignment, and he started off by talking with Eddy Huff.

"How bad did he get hit?" Mitch asked.

Eddy shrugged it off. "A bruise on his cheek, that's about the size of it. Not worth calling you people in. But whether he got slugged or just bumped into something, you can't tell. And somebody like Childers, you don't bring him down to the precinct and sit him in a chair while you poke your finger at him. Not if you want to keep your job."

"If he didn't get slugged, what would he want to make something out of it for?"

"Stuff got stolen from his place, and from three of his neighbors. Somebody broke in, and now Childers wants us to dream up who, but we can't even get to first base on it. Mitch, all you can do is wait around until something happens, and that's it."

"How much property got stolen?" Mitch asked.

"I could look it up, but it runs more than fifty grand."

"Fifty grand!" Mitch said. "What went?"

"I got a list right here. Take a look."

Mitch glanced at it. A Ming vase, some Paul Revere silverware, a bunch of Sandwich glass, a couple of Picasso prints, and so on. The list didn't mean much to Mitch, but it proved that some very special items had been heisted.

The first thing that went through Mitch's mind was you

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couldn't sell that kind of stuff here in town. It would get spotted too easy. So either it had been shipped right out, or else some local fence was handling it for transfer to New York or Chicago or some other big town.

"That Sandwich glass alone is worth two thousand bucks," Eddy was saying. "Whoever took it was a real expert. Knew his onions."

"Yeah," Mitch said, and the picture was beginning to add up. Breaking and entering, and larceny with a fifty-grand take. With the local precinct getting nowheres fast, Childers pretended he got assaulted, which brought in the Homicide Squad, on account they handle all crimes of violence. And the Homicide Squad, they're the specialists, they get things done, and no horsing around.

Anyhow, Mitch listened and then squared it with Huff, so he wouldn't think anybody was stepping on Eddy's toes. With that out of the way, Mitch found out that there was a watchman taking care of those four houses while the owners were away. The watchman was a retired cop by the name of Chuck Dabney, and he had a place up on Harte Avenue.

Dabney had retired about five years ago, and judging by the belly on him he'd spent most of those five years drinking beer. Still, he was no lush, just a beer guzzler. And if his house said anything, it told you he'd put away a nice little sum to help him out, over and above his pension. Nothing out of line, but he must have walked his beat with his hand out and one eye looking the other way.

After Mitch came in and identified himself, Dabney sat him down in the living room. The furniture looked plenty expensive, but not the kind of stuff Amy went for. This stuff, it was high on the pocketbook and low on the know-how.

"Anything you want," Dabney said, "just ask."

What Mitch wanted to ask, though, was why the female who came into the room had married a character like Dabney. Because what she had, she could have sold for a higher bid than Dabney could make. And she'd spruced it up like she'd just come out of the beauty parlor, after going down the line with just about everything they had to sell.

Dabney introduced her. "Honey-Jane," he said, "this is Mitch Taylor, Homicide. He's after information on those break-ins. So you want to get us a bottle while I tell him about it?"

"Not me," Mitch told Dabney. "You know how the lieutenant is. If I took one while I was on the job, I'd get canned in no time."

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"Well," Dabney said, "I guess I'll have to drink for the two of us. Honey-Jane, better mix one for yourself while you're at it. Now, Mitch, what's on your mind?"

"They told me over at the precinct that somebody made quite a haul."

That was no news to Dabney. "Whoever's doing it," he said, "he's a pro. TV and radio weren't touched. Nothing he couldn't walk out with. He knew what he wanted, and he took it."

"What about the other three houses?"

"Same thing—just took the high-class stuff."

"How'd you spot it?" Mitch asked.

"Childers and the others—Ashworth, he has the house next door, and Wellerstein and Van Dyke, they live down the block—they showed me what was valuable, and that's how I know the kind of thing that got took. Somebody hunted around—you could tell by the marks in the dust that he did a lot of looking—and he picked the best. And no fingerprints, either. A glove job."

"Yeah," Mitch said, making like he thought everything was okay, but sizing up Dabney and this Honey-Jane of his in order to decide which one to tackle first. Honey-Jane won out on that competition, so Mitch stood up.

"Well," he said, "I guess that's about all for right now. I got a car outside. Either of you want a lift?"

Dabney swallowed the rest of his drink. "If you're going downtown," he said, "I got to get to the bank."

"Sure," Mitch said. "Glad to help out."

On the way he and Mitch talked mostly about this and that. Mitch told himself that the department was ahead without Dabney around. Because what he'd tried to pull here, and why Eddy Huff hadn't cracked down on him, Mitch didn't know.

Anyhow, as soon as he dropped Dabney off, Mitch turned around and went back to the house. Honey-Jane opened the door and told him to wait, she'd be right with him.

While he hung around in the living room, he could hear her on the phone. Only the way she talked, in a low voice and like she had the phone stuck up against her mouth, Mitch couldn't make out a word. So whatever this was all about, she didn't want him to hear.

When she finished and came back to the living room, she looked kind of pleased with herself. "I was hoping you'd come back," she said, giving with the big smile that almost put a crack in the

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mouth they'd stuck on her back in the beauty shop. "Because Chuck needs help, and so do I. Having things stolen when he's supposed to be watching—of course it isn't really his fault, but you know how people are, if they hire you they start blaming you for everything. And the investigation that this detective made, I can't remember his name—"

"Huff," Mitch said. "Eddy Huff."

"Yes, that's the one. I'm sure he knew what he was doing, but he didn't find anything out, did he? And now to have somebody from the Homicide Squad investigate—I'm sure you'll find out who stole all those things."

"I know right now," Mitch said, "so just tell me where everything is."

Honey-Jane sat down sudden, and for a second Mitch thought she was going to pass out, or else pretend to. "You know?" she said, kind of gasping.

"Sure. Chuck isn't exactly an art expert, so how did he know that only valuable stuff was taken? What happened was that Childers and the rest of them, they showed Chuck what had the high price tags. They told him that when he checked up, make sure this vase and that hunk of silverware was still around. What it amounted to was, they told him what was worth taking, so he went ahead and took it. So where is it? Where'd you put it?"

"I don't know. This is all—" She shook her head like she was finding things out for the first time and was going into shock. "I have to think," she said. "I'm all upset."

"Just tell me," Mitch said.

"I don't know."

"Look," Mitch said. "I can go get a search warrant, only it takes time. Or I can bring Chuck in on charges and get him talking, and then he probably says you and him have the stuff or else sold it or got rid of it somewhere, and that makes you an accomplice and you go to jail along with him. But tell me now, and you'll be out of trouble."

"But—to betray my own husband!"

"You want to tell the truth, don't you?"

She kind of moaned, and she shook her head like she didn't know what to do. Only Mitch figured she did, on account when she used a word like "betray," she was acting—trying to put something over on him. Still, if Mitch put a little pressure on, she'd decide pretty soon to come out with everything.

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"I'm not kidding around," Mitch said. "I'm talking about a fifty-grand larceny, and we don't shove that under the rug and go out and play. You're up to your neck in this. I could pull you in right now and you'd end up where? Getting five to ten, you can bet on it."

"Years?" she said, as if she didn't understand.

"Years," Mitch said, sinking it in. "On the other hand, you tell me where the stuff is, and the insurance people are happy because they don't have to shell out. No trouble there. Then you sit down with the lieutenant and later on with the D.A. and tell them all about it, then—" and Mitch thought of that phone call and how she'd stuck the phone up against her ear to make it all real private. "Then," he said, making a pretty good guess, "you go off with your boy friend and leave Chuck to handle his own mess."

"But I don't know where any of it is," she said. "I really don't."

"You know what Chuck did with it," Mitch said. When she didn't argue the point, he went on. "Mind if I look through the house?"

"You have no right to," she said. "And besides, there's nothing here."

"So where is it?"

"I told you—I don't know. But if it helps any, I've heard Chuck speaking on the phone, always to the same person. Somebody named Hitchens. Or Pitcher. Something like that."

She was playing it cagey. She insisted she didn't know anything, she'd just overheard something on the phone, she wasn't even sure of the name, but maybe it would help. What it amounted to was, she'd admitted that Dabney had stolen fifty grand worth of stuff and sold it to a fence. And now Mitch knew who that fence was—a character named Ludwig Ritchler.

That about wound things up, and Mitch looked at his watch. It was around four, and most times he would have called the lieutenant and asked for somebody to come up here and take charge of Honey-Jane. Then he would have gone back to headquarters, sat down with the lieutenant and worked things out, Mitch maybe getting a search warrant for the Dabney house while a couple of the boys picked up Ritchler and brought him in for questioning. As for Dabney, they could take him whenever they were ready.

That would have cleared things up real nice, but here Amy had that dental appointment and Mitch had to get home and cook

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hamburgers, so he couldn't stick around and tie himself up for too long. What was left was leaving Honey-Jane here alone for a while. Chances were she'd get in touch with her boy friend right away and tell him what had happened. He'd probably say fine, keep out of it, don't mention anything to Chuck, and let the police play it their way. They knew who'd taken the stuff and where it was fenced, so the best thing for her was to shut up and stay out of it.

The idea, then, was for Mitch to get in touch with the lieutenant and have him hold off for a little while. If Mitch handled things right, he'd end up knocking off around five or so, with the lieutenant taking the responsibility of waiting till tomorrow.

With that much figured out, Mitch made his phone call to headquarters and asked for Lieutenant Decker. But the lieutenant had checked out for the day—it was his grandson's birthday and the lieutenant had left word not to be called unless it was an emergency. Which this wasn't.

While Mitch was on the phone, Honey-Jane took herself into the kitchen and Mitch could see she was fixing herself a good stiff drink. So he hung around a little longer in the hope she'd blab out a few things that she'd ought to have kept to herself. Only instead, and Mitch couldn't stop her, she got off on the story of her life—how she'd never had a father and how her mother had been a souse and the whole world was against poor Honey-Jane.

She'd had to get along on her own, and she could have gone in for street work like a lot of girls did, only she wasn't that kind. She'd worked in a department store for a while, and then somebody came along and said she looked like a dancer, would she like a job? The job turned out to be a striptease act, but that was all right, wasn't it? She could let people look at her, couldn't she? But there were a lot of temptations, and she didn't know what would have happened to her if Chuck hadn't come along. He was kind, and Mitch didn't know what a good heart the guy had.

Mitch sat there and listened to her clack away and tried to switch her off, but she was a one-car train going downhill on a greased track and no brakes, so after maybe ten or fifteen minutes he gave up.

He got back to headquarters around a quarter to five and made his report, and he was lucky he did. Because sometime that night Chuck Dabney got knocked off.

Next morning when the call went out, signal Two-Nine, which

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meant a homicide, Mitch was at the drug store getting some medicine for Amy's tooth. She'd been up most of the night and Mitch hadn't gotten too much sleep, either, so he was a little late getting started.

The druggist said he'd send the medicine right over, so with that taken care of, Mitch got on the bus. The result was that he didn't know about the homicide until he got to headquarters, where they turned him around and sent him back out.

He got his regular car, Number Four, and him and Ed Balenky drove out to where somebody'd found Dabney sitting in his car with a bullet hole in his head. It was about a block from Chuck's house, but when Mitch got to the scene, they hadn't even found out who Dabney was or where he lived, on account they couldn't move the body or disturb anything until the Medical Examiner had thumped Dabney a couple of times and decided he'd been shot in the head. Then they had to wait for the pictures to be taken, all of which took an hour or so.

It seemed nobody'd read Mitch's report yet and the lieutenant didn't even know that Mitch had spoken to Dabney yesterday. But Mitch took one look, and made the identification.

"Chuck Dabney," he said. "Retired cop, and the caretaker for Childers and a few others—I turned in the report before I went home. I'm pretty sure he took the stuff Childers is complaining about. I was going to wind things up this morning."

"Brother!" Lieutenant Decker said. "I'd say our timing was a little off. Any idea what's behind this?"

"Well, he was fencing the stuff with Lud Ritchler, so—"

"We'll pick him up," Decker said. "Anything else?"

"I think Dabney's wife, he called her Honey-Jane, she was a stripteaser and she was two-timing him," Mitch said. "I wouldn't want to leave her out of the picture."

"Honey-Jane?" Decker said. "Worked private clubs, mostly. The vice squad had her in a few times, but couldn't make anything stick. So she went and married a cop!"

It went through Mitch's mind that if he hadn't had to go home and cook hamburgers, and if Decker hadn't gone to his grandson's birthday party, Dabney would be around right now. Maybe the lieutenant had the same idea, because he sounded kind of uptight when he told Mitch for him and Balenky to go over to the Dabney house and get hold of this Honey-Jane.

"Throw it smack at her," Decker said. "If that doesn't break

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her, check back here in about an hour. By then we'll know what Ritchler has to say, and we'll either let her go for a while or else question her again."

"Right," Mitch said.

On account Honey-Jane wasn't exactly the brightest female he'd come across lately, Mitch figured he'd have no trouble finding out whether she'd killed Dabney or not. And if it turned out that she had, the chances were she'd be spilling the whole story before Mitch really got going.

The house was only a block from where Dabney's body had been found, and on the way Mitch told Balenky what the setup was.

"Let me tackle her," Mitch said. "Whether she knocked him off or whether she's just going to learn about it for the first time, she's not going to bother with what you're doing, so maybe you can wander around the house and see what's what."

"She's got to be pretty dumb to leave anything around," Balenky said.

"She's dumb," Mitch said, and pulled up a little past the front door. "There," he said, pointing. "That's the place."

Nobody answered the doorbell, and after two or three tries and five minutes or so waiting, nothing happened. "Try phoning her," Mitch said. "Sometimes it takes a phone to wake people up. I'll stick around, just in case."

Balenky fished in his pocket for change. "I think I spotted a booth around the corner," he said, and took off.

Mitch stood in front of the door and watched a couple of cars go by and then a bread truck and then a kid on his way to school and then a young couple came out of a house and kissed each other goodbye and went off in opposite directions, and then Mitch heard a plane somewheres and then Balenky came back. Mitch watched the way he walked, and Balenky watched the way Mitch stood in front of the door, and then Balenky came alongside.

"No soap," he said. "What do we do now?"

"Sit down for a while," Mitch said, "and take it easy."

They'd been waiting for maybe five minutes when a gray compact came up in front of the Dabney house. Two women were in it, and the one that got out was Honey-Jane. She stood on the sidewalk and waved until the car pulled out, and then she walked up to the front door and took out a key.

"Let's go," Mitch said.

Honey-Jane turned and saw them, and she must have recog-

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nized Mitch, because she just stood there with the key in the lock and didn't even try to open the door.

She had a blank look on her face when Mitch got there. "What is it?" she said. "Did you find the things?"

"Let's go inside first," Mitch said, "and then I'll tell you."

"Of course," she said. "I want to hear all about it."

Her hand was steady enough when she turned the key, and you couldn't tell what she was thinking. Except she sat down in the living room without taking off her coat or putting her purse away. "Well?" she said, like she couldn't wait. "Well? What is it?"

"I guess you know about your husband," Mitch said, and tried to guess whether she did, and it kind of bothered him that he wasn't sure.

"What?" she said, like she wanted to get it over with. "What about Chuck? What did he do now?"

Balenky faded away and sort of disappeared without her paying any attention to him, and Mitch said flatly, "He was killed. Shot."

"Oh!" Honey-Jane said, and she didn't make a particularly good widow. She just seemed a little curious. "Shot?" she said, wanting to hear all of it. "When? What happened?"

"Where were you last night?" Mitch asked.

"At my sister's. I went there for dinner, around six o'clock, and I stayed there all night. I do it lots of times. She just drove me back."

That did it, as far as Mitch was concerned, because you don't pop off with your alibi, first thing, unless you know you're going to need it.

"Who's in your sister's family?" Mitch asked.

"Rhoda and her husband and their two children."

"What's the husband's name?"

"John Lawton. Why?"

"Who else?"

"Just the children. Patrick's four and Annie's three."

"Maybe you told your sister to back you up," Mitch said, "and your brother-in-law, too, but they'll both break. And the kids are going to say they saw you before they went to bed and you were there when they got up, but how does that show you didn't get up in the middle of the night and come back here and kill your husband?"

Honey-Jane came out of that one fighting. "I didn't!" she yelled. "You're crazy—I wouldn't do such a thing—my own husband?

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You're making it up, I know all about how the police work. Chuck used to tell me. They accuse you of anything and hope you'll get mixed up and confess, but I didn't do anything and I have nothing to confess." Then she remembered she was supposed to act like a brand-new widow, and she made a try at it "Oh, Chuck!" she said. "Poor Chuck!"

Mitch gave her the first round. She'd held out so far, and it would be up to the lieutenant to take it from there. Except Mitch wasn't really sure that she was the one who'd committed the murder. It struck him that what she'd maybe done was to phone Ritchler and tell him Chuck was about to get arrested and charged with the Childers larceny, and that he'd accuse Ritchler of receiving stolen property and so Ritchler had better do something about it. The result was what she'd hoped for—that Ritchler had come looking for Chuck. He must have found him in his car and shot him right off, which left Honey-Jane with all of Chuck's dough, and free to go off with her boy friend.

Still, that was up to the lieutenant to prove, and Mitch's instructions were to check with the lieutenant in case Honey-Jane didn't break right off. And she hadn't.

Mitch might have left it there except Balenky came to the doorway and said, "Mitch, you want to come here a minute?"

Mitch said, "Sure," and then, to Honey-Jane, "I'll be right back."

He and Balenky went to the back of the house before Balenky spoke. "Mitch," he said, "I think I got something. She's got a picture in her drawer, hidden down under some underwear, and it says 'Love to my Honey-Jane.' I think I've seen the guy somewhere. And there's a phone number scratched on the wall next to the telephone table. She's got a calendar in front of it, like she didn't want anybody else to see it. Give you any ideas?"

"Let's see the picture," Mitch said.

Balenky fumbled around in the underwear and brought up the photograph, and Mitch somehow wasn't particularly surprised to see who it was. He frowned and said, "That's Eddy Huff, supposed to be handling that Childers larceny."

The idea of a crooked cop always got to Mitch, but when something hits you in the face, you can't help looking at it, and right now it all came together. He remembered that Eddy Huff hadn't made much of an investigation, he'd even told Mitch to sit back and do nothing. So it looked like maybe Chuck had told Honey-

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Jane all about the valuable stuff, what it was and where it was, and then she'd gone and told Huff, and all he had to do was go and take it.

"Eddy Huff, cop," Mitch said to Balenky. "Better call that number she wrote on the wall. If Huff answers, make up something, but play it cool, we don't want him to take off. Just check and make sure it's Huff. Then come and tell Honey-Jane you just spoke to Eddy and he spilt everything. Okay?"

"Okay," Balenky said.

Back in the living room, Mitch poured it on. "We know all about it," he said to Honey-Jane, "so you'll help yourself by not trying to protect your boy friend any more."

"Boy friend?" she said.

"Balenky's talking to him right now, and the only thing we don't know is whether to charge him or you or the both of you, because here's the way you played it. Chuck told you about the stuff in those houses, all the details, and you passed the information on to your boy friend. After that, all he had to do was get into the house and spot what he was after."

Mitch strung it along for a while, waiting for Balenky, but Mitch was pretty sure of his ground, and it was no surprise to him when Balenky came and said in a loud voice, "Eddy Huff isn't home. I guess we can pick him up a little later on."

It was more than Honey-Jane could take, so she cranked up a few tears while she probably was thinking up just what to say. Only she couldn't think of anything, so all she said was, "Eddy? What about him?"

"He killed Chuck," Mitch said flatly.

This time her tears were for real, and she gave out with what she knew, which was that Huff had committed the larcenies. After Mitch got on the case, Huff had panicked. He told Honey-Jane he was going to see Chuck last night and that she'd better sleep at her sister's, because there might be trouble.

Mitch had guessed right. Huff had shot Chuck, and all that was left was to bring her down to headquarters and get her statement. After that, the lieutenant would go to work on Eddy Huff.

Mitch felt like he'd done a good job. Here he'd cracked a case before anybody else had even thought of Eddy Huff, and there was no reason why Mitch, after making a full report to Lieutenant Decker, couldn't expect to get the day off so he could take care of Amy. That was the least Decker could do for him.

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It seemed cut and dried, and so it was kind of a shock when Mitch walked into Homicide quarters, ready to make his report, and they told him Decker was questioning Detective Huff, who'd been arrested on suspicion of homicide.

"How come?" Mitch asked, and he wasn't exactly happy.

Bankhart, coming out of the squad room, answered that one. "Ritchler," he said. "Huff was selling him stolen property, and Dabney knew about it and would have made trouble for Ritchler and Huff, the pair of them. According to Ritchler, and he has an alibi for last night, Huff promised to take care of Dabney. And it looks like he did."

"Well," Mitch said, "better tell the boss we got Dabney's wife outside. Balenky's with her, he'll bring her in. Because me, I got some things to do." And he went to the phone and called home.

Amy answered, and he said to her, "How's the tooth?"

"It's a little better," she said, "but it still hurts."

"I know," Mitch said. "It's no fun, a tooth like that, so suppose on the way home I pick up something to eat. Because I'm pretty good at fixing up some hamburgers, for instance. And"—he kind of gulped before he came out with it—"and don't worry, Amy, I'll do the washing up too."

It had been that kind of a day.

"Q"

NEXT MONTH...

16 NEW stories — including

HUGH PENTECOST (about Pierre Chambrun)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

RUTH RENDELL (about two sisters)

ANDREW GARVE (about a glass of port)

DAVIS GRUBB (about Bull Pierson)

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'TWAS THE PLIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

by ***HERSCHEL COZINE***

'Twas the night before Christmas, and down at the station
The men were enjoying some Yuletide libation.
The last-minute shoppers rushed by in the street,
With gaily wrapped boxes and tired aching feet.
"Not a murder in town for a day and a half,"
Said Ellery Queen with a good-natured laugh.
His eye gave a wink, and he nodded his head,
"I hope it continues forever," he said.
Then out in the street there arose such a shout
That Ellery ran to the door and looked out.
The light from the street lamp glowed eerily bright
On the red-suited man who lay dead in the night;
A sleigh and six reindeer stood patiently by—
'Twas a scene that would make the most hardened man cry.
"It's cold-blooded murder," said Ellery Queen,
"And there's only one man who could be quite that mean.
That evil and vicious old Scrooge—Ebenezer!
Now, dash away, men, and arrest the old geezer!"
And then in a twinkling they made the arrest,
And after much protestation the old man confessed.
"But how did you know so fast and so quick
That I was the one who murdered St. Nick?"
Said Ellery Queen, "It's as plain as the day:
Two of his reindeer were gone from the sleigh.
And who would kill Santa—that is the crux—
Who'd kill him for only a couple of 'bucks'?
The question was simple, the answer quite clear:
You're a miserly man with no Christmas cheer."
And Ellery looked the old man in the eye.
"Bah, humbug!" was all Mr. Scrooge could reply.

EPILOGUE

Old Santa Claus lived, much to Scrooge's surprise;
For it's true, as you know, that a myth never dies.
And I heard him exclaim as he patted his chest,
"God bless Mrs. Claus for this bulletproof vest."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 455th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .what might be called a crimescape, a vignette of villainy. . .

The author, L. G. Kerrigan, is 24, was "previously a bank accountant" and is "currently connected with professional sports (baseball)." The author's hobbies are "mostly sports oriented except, of course, for writing." . . .

AFTER THE STORM

by L. G. KERRIGAN

Mrs. Wilcox could hear the steady patter of rain on the cottage roof. It was growing fainter. The worst of the storm had passed while she sat snugly in the small parlor, knitting booties of soft cashmere. Only twice had she left the deep chair and the warmth of the crocheted coverlet thrown over her lap—once to make a small pot of tea and once to check the tide.

The ocean could be seen from the kitchen window. It had relentlessly crept inland, but she wasn't afraid. She had lived in the cottage by the sea for ten years and had weathered many storms.

The surrounding cottages were vacant, owned by the winter people. Transients, Mrs. Wilcox called them—gaudy women dressed in bikinis, littering the beach with their disgracefully naked bodies. Mrs. Wilcox dreaded the arrival of the winter season when the "transients" would flock there in droves, fleeing the northern cold and bluster to soak in the sun's warmth. If it weren't for Mr. Wilcox and his arthritis they would live elsewhere. But the warm climate eased his pain.

She got up now, for the third time. Keen instinct told her that Mr. Wilcox was nearing home. She opened the kitchen door and peered out into the fine mist which sprayed lightly in her face. She sniffed, wrinkling her nose in distaste. Already the odor of dead mussels was in the air. It was horrid. After every storm she

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was forced to smell stale salty seaweed and the dank dead bodies of small sea creatures.

Mr. Wilcox could be seen in the distance, his slicker a tiny yellow dot against the gray horizon.

Mrs. Wilcox hurried to start more tea. She sliced lemon, popping a small piece into her mouth and sucking on it noisily.

Even though it was Friday, she wasn't expecting the weekly vegetable man—not in this weather. But suddenly there he was framed in the doorway, the familiar wooden box of fruits and vegetables in his hands.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't hear you knock. Did you—?"

From beneath the green peppers the man produced a shiny black gun.

He shot her once, in the head. Just before the trigger was pulled, Mrs. Wilcox thought how strange it was that this wasn't her regular vegetable man.

Mr. Wilcox shook the drops from his slicker and removed his galoshes before entering the cottage. Sara didn't like mess.

"Sara," he yelled as he entered. He stopped cold when he saw her lying there on the floor, a small trickle of blood running from the hole in her head.

"Oh, my God," he said. He had seen the vegetable man leaving the cottage. He hadn't recognized his face—he was too far away. Then after a motionless moment he telephoned the police.

The sun finally showed itself the following Friday. Perfect fishing weather, Mr. Wilcox thought. He had to rummage through the shed for his gear, as it had not been used in such a long while. Mrs. Wilcox had never cared for the sport and the sight of a dead grouper sent her scurrying to the parlor with her fingers pinching her nose. "Get that smelly thing out of here, John!" she would say. "And never bring another one into the house!"

Mr. Wilcox sat and enjoyed his breakfast, anticipating the fine fish he'd catch. Everyone knew that after a storm the sea was plentiful.

Off the ocean a light breeze gathered, sending strong sea smells through the open windows. Mr. Wilcox couldn't remember the last time the windows had been opened. He sniffed deeply and smiled to himself, anxious to leave. But he had to wait. He had to pay off the vegetable man.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 456th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .a strange and eerie tale—and beware of subliminal connotations. . .

The author, Richard E. Hutton, "after a brief, unofficial stint in medical school, and an even briefer official one in law school, collaborated on two medical textbooks, wrote technical papers and articles, edited a journal for the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped, and generally scrambled for a living." At present he is writing fiction and music, playing the piano, and "praying for a break." Let's hope the publication of his first story in EQMM is only the prelude to his "big break". . .

A PAIR OF GLOVES

by RICHARD E. HUTTON

They were beautiful. Even from outside the store Ferris could see their quality. They lay among other pieces of outerwear—a thick scarf, a leather jacket, a lamb's-wool cap—as if they had been casually dropped in the display window of Vachin's by the decorator. But they lay just so, infused by light, and they captured the gaze of anyone glancing in.

Ferris looked around, suddenly aware of how foolish it was to be so taken by a pair of gloves. But nobody was paying any attention. It was the holiday season. Thin men with pillows stuffed under their shirts tinkled bells on every corner. Silver tinsel hung from plastic trees in almost every store. Salesmen wore green-and-red lapel pins and faces of strained and desperate joy. The pins themselves were a mark of identity for each store. Those that attracted a quietly elegant clientele sanctioned either no pins at all or those of sophisticated designs.

Stores that catered to the less affluent strove for a flashier appeal—Simpson's Cut-Rate down the block had its salesmen

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decked out in the most complex contraptions. One cashier's chest was covered by a Santa Claus riding electrically over three rooftops, following eight tiny reindeer whose legs moved in unison. Another employee wore a wreath with her name inscribed in flowing script on the border. In one store red and green lights flashed in computerized random patterns around a miniature Nativity scene.

Ferris looked back at the gloves, trying to guess how much they cost. Margaret had seen them and had fastened on them like a lamprey eel. She didn't do this often, but when she did, it was trouble. He had been living with her for more than a year, and she normally displayed quiet maturity in the face of disaster; but when she wanted something, she would scream, pout, go on starvation fasts for weeks—anything to force him to buy it for her.

Ferris shivered and turned toward the door, knowing he had little choice.

"Don't," a voice behind him said. "Not in there."

Ferris turned to see a wild man whose face, bloated and asymmetrical, cut and scabbed, looked as if it had got in the way of a water buffalo's charge. His white hair waved in the wind like a shredded flag of cowardice. A crazy man.

Ferris shrugged and began to turn away. He had seen the man before up the street, harassing passers-by pantomiming the tinkling Santas, playing scarecrow to the season's flocks.

The man put a filthy, bony hand in his path.

"Wait." He sidled up. "A warning," he giggled, and tilted his head back in a soundless laugh, showing two brown teeth set in his mouth like a seven-ten split.

Embarrassed, Ferris moved back against the glass and past the man's outstretched arm.

"I'm telling you," the man said. "Not in there. There's blood on their hands." He turned and saw that a crowd had gathered.

"A poem," he cried. His fleshless fingers flashed like spider's legs. "A poem for the gentleman." He turned to Ferris and spoke quickly, furiously, under his breath. "Go in there, and by the time you come out I'll have a poem for you." He grinned again.

Ferris ducked into the store. Inside it was warm and quiet. Small bells sang somewhere, their sound muffled by the thickness of the drapes and carpet.

A salesman saw him and approached. He was bald, and the top of his head seemed to come to a point. With the fall of his chins

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on his chest and the sloping of his shoulders, he looked more like a well-fed bullet than a man.

"Sir?"

"The gloves in the window—I'd like to see a pair if I might."

The salesman smiled. "Certainly. Please follow me."

He led the way to a counter at the rear of the store and opened a drawer behind it. He reached down, then set a deep wood case on the counter.

"Are these for you, or are they a gift?" he asked.

"A gift."

The salesman opened the box. A pair of gloves lay inside, slightly darker than the pair in the window. They looked supple and light, as if they were perfectly molded to whatever hand would slip them on. The fingers curled gently, naturally, against the palm.

"Would you care to try them on? If you like the feel I can order a pair to fit whatever size you need."

Ferris put them on. They flowed onto his hands like mercury, fitting every crease, adjusting to each movement. He flexed his fingers and saw that they moved easily over his skin without binding at the knuckles. They were unlined, thin, yet he could feel their strength. Gloves like these—they would be cool indoors, warm outdoors.

He looked at them closely, noting that they had no visible seams either along the fingers or on the sides of the palm. They stretched slightly as he pulled them off, then retracted to their original shape, precisely.

"What are they made of?"

The salesman smiled. "They are leather from a rare and endangered species."

"Are they warm?"

"Very."

"And how much do they cost?"

"Two hundred dollars for the pair."

Ferris choked. "You said *two hundred*?" he asked.

The salesman took note of his face, and his mouth drew into a thin tight line. "Correct," he said, returning the gloves to the box.

But Margaret, Ferris thought. Damn it, she'll get them out of me somehow. She always got her way.

"I'll take a pair," he said with some difficulty.

The salesman looked at him quickly. "Will that be cash or

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charge, Mr.—?"

"Langston. Charge, please." He dug in his wallet. "My credit card."

"Certainly. And the size?"

"She wears a size seven."

"Fine. And the shape of her hands?"

Ferris thought for a moment. "Thin palms, long fingers."

The salesman wrote down the information. "I must speak to our purchaser immediately if we are to have them by Christmas. Would you excuse me?" He slipped quietly away.

Ferris walked to the front of the store and looked out. The crazy man was exhorting the small crowd which had formed around him. Ferris could hear his voice, but he could not make out the words. Just then the man turned, caught his eye, and mouthed something inaudible.

"Will there be anything else, Mr. Langston?" The salesman was back. Ferris had not heard him approach.

"What about that fellow out there, the strange-looking one?"

The salesman shrugged. "He's been around for weeks. He recites poetry and baits the merchants and the shoppers. We've tried to get rid of him several times, but the police say they have no reason to detain him." He turned back to Ferris, his body moving as one with his head. "I suppose we shall just have to put up with him for now. Will that be all, sir?"

Ferris nodded.

"Then would you sign here, please?"

Ferris signed quickly.

"The gloves will be ready in two weeks, on December twenty-third. And you'll have no trouble with the size. The gloves are marvelous. We fit them slightly small and they conform to the hand of the wearer. Always a perfect fit."

"Thank you," said Ferris. He was relieved. The ordeal was over. Margaret would have her gloves and he would have his peace. Spending money like that hurt, but once it was done he could easily forget.

He walked to the front of the shop, opened the door, and stepped out into a freezing blast. The lights of the city shone upward, reflecting pale purple on the cover of clouds and mist.

The crazy man was waiting.

"You bought them," he said. "You bought the gloves."

Ferris stopped. "How did you know?"

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"Oh, they all do. They all buy 'em." The man grinned. He stood with his worn coat open, oblivious of the cold which cut through Ferris' clothes like a blade. "Did you ask what they were made of? Did you?"

"Yes, but—"

"The poem," the man shrilled. "The Christmas poem." He glanced at Ferris through small black eyes. His fingers wove swiftly through the air, kneading it, molding it to shape. The crowd behind him waited.

He swung his arm in a huge arc.

"A froth of color, boxed and bowed,
Lies cold beneath the slaughtered trees.
A flaccid jolly dumps his load
Among electric agonies."

His voice rose with the verse, breaking on the last syllable. He frowned.

"No, too negative. Too negative," he said, stamping his foot. He looked at Ferris and cocked his head like a bird.

"A Christmas delight.
A thrill in the night.
A poem for you.
Some cash for me too?"

He stuck out his hand for a gratuity.

Ferris reached in his pocket, found a coin, and dropped it into the outstretched palm. As he did so, he noticed an angry crescent-shaped scar surrounding the base of the man's thumb.

Ferris shuddered and walked on.

Two weeks later Ferris was back. The pace of the crowd in the shopping area had, if anything, grown more frenetic. As Christmas approached, the stores had added even more decorations, had become even more phosphorescently green and red.

Only Vachin's had not changed. Its decorations were kept to the barest minimum. Its window display held the same items, in the same order as before. The gloves still lay, as if carelessly thrown, in the middle.

At least the crazy man was nowhere to be seen. Ferris had

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searched the crowd for him as he walked to the shop, but had not been able to find him. The flow of people appeared normal, vast rivers along the outer margins of the sidewalks, with natural swirls and eddies around each store entrance.

Ferris sighed with relief and entered the store. The same salesman, sleek as a seal, noticed him and came over immediately.

"Are the gloves ready?" Ferris asked. He hoped they were. Margaret was not only adamant about receiving the presents she asked for, she was also a fanatic about timing. Christmas presents had to be given on Christmas, birthday presents on birthdays, as if the pattern were preordained. She acted as if any deviation would jerk the machine of universal destruction into its final cycle.

The salesman looked concerned. "Yes, sir. But there is a small problem. Would you follow me, please."

Ferris walked to the rear of the store. As the salesman searched under the counter, Ferris looked idly out the front window, and even from where he was standing he could see a small commotion.

"That crazy man back?" he asked.

The salesman looked up and followed his gaze to the front. "Oh," he smiled, "I think not."

He finally found the case and placed it on the counter.

"So what's our problem?" Ferris asked.

"Well, sir. You see, these items are made from rare leather—one piece for each glove. In the tanning and curing process we do our best to remove any imperfections which may mar the final appearance. The wrinkles and creases disappear, as well as any chance blemishes the skin might have had." He looked up with pride. "As you know, each pair is different, each is an original. In the case of this pair, however, I am afraid that we found a small imperfection that was not removed during the processing. I assure you that it will not affect the durability of the glove. The leather is neither punctured nor thin in spots. But—" He shrugged. "We can do one of two things. Either we can give you this pair at half price or you might decide to wait another two weeks for a new pair."

Ferris thought for a moment. One hundred dollars was far better for him than two hundred. And if Margaret noticed—*if* she noticed—he could tell her that the imperfection was a mark of distinction. Certainly no two pairs were alike, and each pair

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needed something to distinguish it. He hoped the mark was small.

"May I see them before I decide?"

"Of course."

The salesman took the gloves out of the box. They looked magnificent. Ferris picked up the left one to examine it. The leather was supple and tan, beautifully formed. There was not a mark on it.

"Not that one, sir. This one."

The salesman picked up the other glove and turned it over, palm up. The light hit it squarely in mid-palm, just below the long thin fingers. Ferris glanced down.

"Right here," said the salesman.

And Ferris noticed the vestige of a crescent-shaped ridge, faint yet discernible, which circled the base of the thumb.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

PRESENT TIME: The time of year does not exist when it is not a joy to receive a book as a gift, either from a loved one or from yourself (although the two are not mutually exclusive). But this is the time of year when more of us give consideration to this pleasure. The difference between cheap paperback reprints and sumptuous first-edition collector's items is mainly one of degree rather than of kind. For those with the good taste to give books as presents, and adequate funds to indulge a bibliophile's passion, here are a few recommendations:

CHANDLER CHANDLER CHANDLER: The Ecco Press is the latest publisher to pay homage to Raymond Chandler. A volume called *The Notebooks of Raymond Chandler and English Summer* (distributed by Viking, $10) is a wonderful potpourri of delectables—the sort of book generally reserved for poets and essayists, not popular novelists, and particularly not those who wrote mystery fiction. It contains such treasures as illustrations by the inimitable Edward Gorey, an introduction by Frank MacShane, a short "Gothic Romance" by Chandler, and excerpts from his notebooks titled, for example, "Great Thought," "Pickpocket Lingo," "Slang and Hard Talk," and "Story Idea: Fantastic."

GOOD NOOSE: In recent years, James Gould Cozzens has developed a serious flaw: he simply doesn't write enough. The author of *The Just and the Unjust* and *By Love Possessed* has deprived his large and devoted readership of his skill to a lamentable degree. *A Rope for Dr. Webster* won't satisfy his fans because it's not long enough to accommodate those with even the shortest attention span. It's like one salted peanut. But it's a splendid tidbit, and as a collector's item it is probably the highlight of the year. This previously unpublished essay about a famous Boston murder trial has been issued in a special velvet box, limited to 350 copies numbered and signed by the author. Available for $35 from Bruccoli Clark Books, 1700 Lone Pine

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Road, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48013.

ALIMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON: The very idea of another cookbook would be, under most circumstances, enough to make you lose your appetite, to put it gently. But that just proves you should never generalize. Never. When a publisher puts its collective mind to a task, it is sometimes capable of demonstrating the kind of good taste an author dreams about. This has happened with *Dining with Sherlock Holmes* (Bobbs-Merrill, $12.95). This succulent concoction of Julia C. Rosenblatt, a Sherlock Holmes aficionado and scholar, and Frederic H. Sonnenschmidt of the CIA (no, not that one: the Culinary Institute of America), one of the world's most honored chefs, deserves four stars. (Not only are gourmet recipes in abundance, but the authors provide indispensable serendipity, as well: how to carve the pheasant after it's roasted, how to arrange it on the platter to tempt even the jaded gourmand, etc. Compliments to the chef.)

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Nicholas Meyer's lush cinematic treatment of his best-selling *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* is the first film in some time where the opening credits are given footnotes (coolly beautiful Samantha Eggar's Mary Watson is explained as the doctor's "*only* canonical wife," for instance) and the first Sherlockian film in which Watson is billed *before* Holmes, and in which he actually limps from that old war wound. Nicol Williamson is superb as the tortured master sleuth, his bland face registering such high-charged neurotic emotion as to make Basil Rathbone in memory seem somnambulist. The film is an entertainment.

Williamson presents us also with the screen's *dashingest* Holmes, never walking when he can run, a trait he shares with Dustin Hoffman's *Marathon Man,* in the heart-pounding film fashioned by William Goldman from his novel. A college runner is swept into bizarre intrigue, and Laurence Olivier, seen above as a misunderstood, cringing Moriarty, here plays surely the most evil role of his career. Bloody, pumped with adrenalin and surprises, *Marathon Man* unashamedly classes itself in ads as "a thriller."

Other thrillers coming to the movies include the similarly themed *Two-Minute Warning* and *Black Sunday,* and Roger Moore (another addition in the Sherlock-

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ian ranks) again as James Bond in *The Spy Who Loved Me.* Mel Brooks' current comedy venture is a feature-length parody of—and homage to—the films of Alfred Hitchcock. It will of course be a thriller with laughs—and no doubt at one point flocks of birds overhead—and Brooks is determined to "persuade Hitchcock to take one of his quiet little bows in the movie." Good *evening.*

There's mystery theater ahead this winter too. *The Runner Stumbles,* a priestly whodunit which was an experimental play in Connecticut, has become a hit on Broadway. The Goodspeed Opera House, often a source of melodrama, is currently staging *Annie,* a musical based on the orphan heroine of the comic strip, replete with Dickensian workhouse criminality and the treacheries surrounding her millionaire protector. Another musical to look forward to is the talented Stephen Sondheim's period treatment of *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,* whose customers were catapulted from his barber chair through a trap door to surface as meat pies. Lyrical Grand Guignol, murderously funny—Sondheim hopes. Curtain going up!

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INTERVIEW: DICK FRANCIS

Never before in the annals of crime fiction has an author written so frequently about a sport, and with so much success, as Dick Francis. And never has someone been so qualified to write exhaustively of his special subject. One of the greatest jockeys in the long history of "The Sport of Kings," Francis has had published fourteen acclaimed novels involving that sport.

EQMM: After all those years as one of England's leading jockeys, how did you manage to suddenly switch so drastically and become a crime writer?

FRANCIS: Actually, it was forced on me. My agent suggested —about three or four months after that 1956 Grand National episode in which the Queen Mother's horse collapsed under me—that I write my autobiography. I said I couldn't do anything like that. He said, "Oh, you have a wonderful peg on which to hang it; sure you can. I'll get you a ghostwriter if you can't." He did put a ghostwriter in touch—I can't remember now if it was a man or a woman—but the conditions were so ridiculous: he or she wanted to live with us for days, weeks, on end and have meals with us, and be with us all the time just to see how we lived. My wife and I didn't want that intrusion on our privacy, so I said, "No, I couldn't have that." So my wife Mary (she has a much

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better education than I) said, "You are always writing long letters to people and you've written a few articles, why don't you write the book? I'll be your editor." And that's what happened. If I was at a loss for a word or two, or had gone on the wrong way, she would put me right.

EQMM: Did the fiction writing evolve from that?

FRANCIS: Word got around that I had done about half of this autobiography, when the sports editor of the *Sunday London Express* approached me and asked me to write a few articles about my ideas on racing, the horses I'd ridden, the jockeys I'd been riding against; about a half dozen in all. After I'd done two or three, he asked me to sign on as a columnist, a racing correspondent. I didn't sign on because I didn't think I could do it, didn't think it was my calling. But it went on for 16 years.

EQMM: What about the first novel?

FRANCIS: After three years or so of this life as a newspaperman, we found it wasn't as lucrative as being a leading jockey. We had two boys to educate and we didn't want to lower our standard of living, so Mary said, "Why don't you write a thriller?" because we loved going to see plays and films and read thrillers. I thought I could do it—I had had lots of practice writing by then—so eventually I did.

I wrote *Dead Cert* and it was published in 1962, without a word being changed. They've come pretty regularly since then.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Following the success of Maj Sjöwall and the late Per Wahlöö, Sweden's police procedural team, more European mystery writers are being published in this country. Danish author Poul Orum's second mystery is *Nothing But the Truth* (Pantheon, $7.95), translated by Kenneth Barclay, in which Detective-Inspector Jonas Morck investigates the death of the drunken assistant editor of a provincial advertising weekly. Solid detection, tangled relationships, and an ambiguous conclusion mark this distinguished novel in the tradition of Simenon. (****)

Janwillem van de Wetering is a former Amsterdam policeman who lives in the U.S. and writes in English. *The Corpse on the Dike* (Houghton Mifflin, $6.95) is a standard procedural in plot and action, but the characters, style, and humor are quite distinctive. The empathy between crooks and cops is remarkable. All the characters are likeable, and they get along famously. (***)

The month's third continental

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entrant is not a procedural. Hansjörg Martin's *Sleeping Girls Don't Lie* (St. Martin's, $7.95), translated from the German by Joachim Neugroschel, concerns smart-alecky adman Hans Obuch, who finds a dead girl on a train and gets involved in a fatalistic, lightly-motivated way. The plot is undistinguished, but there are some dividends in the telling and the background of Germany in 1951. (**)

**** Harry Kemelman: *Wednesday the Rabbi Got Wet,* Morrow, $8.95. Hurricane Betsy and murder strike Barnard's Crossing the same evening, involving Rabbi David Small in his customary mix of detection and temple politics. As in many Rabbi Small novels, the mystery puzzle is rather slight, but the insights into people, religion, and contemporary life make up for it.
**** Simon Brett: *Cast in Order of Disappearance,* Scribners, $6.95. This witty and cleverly plotted tale of murder and blackmail in London's theatrical world introduces a new sleuth in actor-playwright Charles Paris. A good bet for readers who have enjoyed the cases of Tim Heald's Simon Bognor.
*** Velda Johnston: *Deveron Hall,* Dodd Mead, $7.95. A Scotland-based gothic that offers a commendably self-reliant heroine and a neat surprise, amply foreshadowed. A highly professional job.
*** Don Tracy: *Death Calling—Collect,* Pocket Books, $1.50. A skillful depiction of small-town tensions, soured nostalgia, and an aging hero, former Military Police undercover man who wearies of telling people he's not CIA.
*** Mark Nelson: *The Crusoe Test,* St. Martin's, $7.95. The six passengers on the luxury yacht *Midas* suddenly discover the captain and crew have vanished. Is this games-loving Brad Jenner's way of testing four of his executives for possible promotion? A hard premise to swallow, and characters less interesting than they should be, but ample action, undeniable suspense and readability.
*** Margaret Yorke: *Cast for Death,* Walker, $6.95. An intricate and well-written espionage-detection hybrid with a theatrical background. Much Shakespeare-quoting by detective Patrick Grant and others; interesting sidelights on the dating of old paintings.
*** Will Perry: *Murder at the U.N.,* Dodd Mead, $6.95. The assassination of a United Nations Secretary-General makes for a world-scale whodunit with the governments of the major powers among the suspects. In style and subject matter very reminiscent of Hugh Pentecost.
*** Ed McBain: *Guns,* Random House, $6.95. Colley Donato kills a cop during the commission of a robbery, goes on the lam. The author's special gift for narrative and dialogue makes even small-time crooks interesting reading, no minor feat. But we get enough slow motion violence in the movies.
** Diane Stevens: *Labyrinth,* Doubleday, $5.95. Good middle-grade

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gothic set in Colorado, with lost mines, secret passages, and another death in slow motion. The villain will take some guessing; the hero won't.

Some early reviewers have expressed disappointment with Agatha Christie's *Sleeping Murder* (Dodd Mead, $7.95), the posthumously published last case of Miss Marple, written during World War II. It's true that the spectacular pyrotechnics of 1975's *Curtain,* Hercule Poirot's swan song and a *tour de force* in the Roger Ackroyd-Orient Express mode, are missing here, but that was never Miss Marple's style anyway. Few mysteries being written today offer as neat and devious a fair-play plot, and not all readers will see through the misdirections and red herrings to the one possible killer. If you are curious to know why the heroine runs screaming from a performance of *The Duchess of Malfi* when an actor intones, "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young," or why she always expects a doorway where there is none in her newly bought house, you will want to read this book. It's a good solid average Christie of the thirties or forties, and it's nice to be reminded just how good that is. (****)

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE HANGED MEN, by David Harper. Dodd, Mead & Company, $7.95.

The hanged men dangled in ripe clusters from the bare branches of the autumn trees. They were Halloween dummies made of old clothes stuffed with straw that kids had hung along the mountain road. Warren Stone counted nine of the swaying figures, including the one his friend had just used for target practice. But *that* hanged man wasn't stuffed with straw. It was bleeding!

"There's not a superfluous word in this taut, authentic thriller, and every bit of the action is adroitly plotted, fast moving and convincing...the book has enough surprises to make it a read-in-one-sitting entertainment."—*Publishers Weekly*

MAGICIANS OF MYSTERY, edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

Ellery Queen's *Magicians of Mystery* is the 32nd in the series of semi-annual anthologies of stories from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* It sparkles with misdirection, illusion, hocus-pocus, and sleight-of-hand, beginning with Stanley Ellin's dazzling story, "The Moment of Decision." The collection includes stories by such other wizards in the genre as Erle Stanley Gardner, J. J. Marric (John Creasey), Cornell Woolrich, Julian Symons, Phyllis Bentley, Edward D. Hoch, Patricia Highsmith, Lawrence Treat, Michael Gilbert, Joe Gores, Ellery Queen—and ending, appropriately enough, with a Merlini story by mystery writer and magician, Clayton Rawson.

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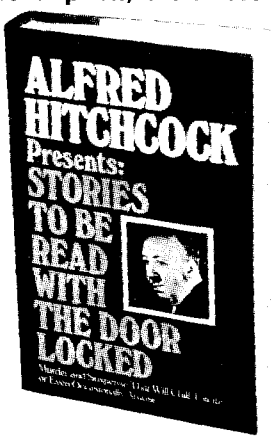

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a *NEW* crime story by

ISAK ROMUN

This story might be called a sequel to Isak Romun's "With Homage to Saki," which appeared in the April 1976 issue of EQMM—except that this story deals with entirely different main characters . . .

Someone should write a 'tec treatise on the relationship between the culinary art and the fine art of murder. It is not only a matter of poisons, detected or undetected, suspected or unsuspected—as witness Sir Lulworth Quayne's curious predicament . . .

WITH MORE HOMAGE TO SAKI

by *ISAK ROMUN*

Sebastien had just served the bird, a delicately creamed and scented *pato con coco.* Sir Lulworth Quayne, in a trancelike operation, had sliced and forked the first dainty sliver of duckling when he noted on the periphery of his vision the figure of the cook standing in the dining-room entrance.

Now, Sir Lulworth held that all important rituals, which included the consumption of the lunchtime entrée, should be unsullied by the interposition of exterior objects and events. Accordingly, he arrested the fork in its passage to his mouth. At first he felt peevish, as if someone were viewing his soul in function. But then, recalling Sebastien's usually sensitive, and occasionally mercurial, nature, he said in a kindly tone, "Is there something, Sebastien?"

The cook took a step or two back into the room and, in a voice which through long residence in England had just the merest hint of its Pyrenean origin, told his employer that he was giving his notice.

Sir Lulworth fell back in his chair, the fork clattering to the bone-china plate, the duckling in coconut cream forgotten for the

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moment. "Leave!" he exclaimed, his cry unbecomingly close to a scream. "But why? I've met the offers of all comers." His face formed into a network of reproving wrinkles as he asked, "Has Clovis Sangrail been at you again for his mother? How much has he offered this time?"

"No, sir, it's nothing of that sort," the cook responded. "Lord Sangrail has not been around of late. Besides, I have enough money put aside for my needs."

As well you should, Sir Lulworth thought irritably, with what I've been paying you, not to mention your brazen extortions from butcher and greengrocer. But the knight masked these bitter thoughts as he asked, "But, Sebastien, we have always worked out these matters, haven't we?"

Sebastien cut in impatiently. "I repeat, it's not money, Sir Lulworth. You have been more than generous. It's my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes. I may have told you of his small restaurant in our town of Saint Symphorien," the cook explained. "It has been in the family for generations. My father, who was my teacher, is now old and wishes me to return and carry on the family business."

"Exemplary thought, Sebastien. But there are others," Sir Lulworth protested desperately. "I know you have brothers."

"Yes, there are *others*!" Sebastien admitted coldly, his tone informing his employer of the impertinence of that line of reasoning. Clearly, there were, in a practical sense, no others and to this Sir Lulworth mutely agreed as he recalled a long inventory of Sebastien's culinary concoctions. Lulworth stabbed with his fork at the duckling, now cooled and showing unappetizing fissures in the surface of its cream sauce.

"Take this away," he ordered, pointing to the plate. "And come back in five minutes."

"With the *flan de piña*?" Sebastien inquired solicitously.

"No. Just yourself. I'll have something to show you."

When the cook departed, Sir Lulworth got up from the table and walked quickly into the adjoining study. From a wall safe he took out two pieces of paper. One, crumpled once but now smoothed out and folded carefully, bore small neat handwriting. This piece of paper he returned to the safe. The other sheet, inscribed with his flowing hand, he took back to the dining room.

The cook was there before him with. Sir Lulworth noted disquietingly, a dark ugly scowl upon his face.

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"You remember Canon Peter, Sebastien?" the knight began.

"Yes, sir. Canon Peter of tragic memory." Sebastien said his words respectfully enough, belying the impression projected by a certain tightness about his mouth.

"Exactly as I expressed it a few years back," Lulworth agreed. "The canon of tragic memory. You recall, too, Sebastien, that at his inquest it was never established who killed dear Canon Peter. You were considered but dismissed on the basis of lack of motive."

Sebastien nodded—a short sharp nod reminiscent of a quick precise cleaver cut delivered to a mutton joint.

Sir Lulworth went on, "Well, my nephew, Egbert, in sorting through some papers of Peter's sister found a letter from the canon that put a rather different face on the matter. In short, it provides details of a disagreement over an Ash Wednesday lunch, a cup of coffee thrown into your face, and, as the canon put it"—here Lulworth consulted the paper he had brought into the dining room—"ah, yes, 'a deplorable lack of self-control' on your part. You grasp the letter's significance? Motive established."

Sebastien lunged forward and whipped the sheet from his employer's hand. "You'll find that what you have there is a transcript, in my scrawl, of the incriminating part of the canon's letter," Lulworth advised. "Which letter, in its totality, resides securely locked away but not in a location which would be overlooked in the event of my precipitate passing."

"How did you get it?"

"My nephew, whose plodding nature more than makes up for his want of imagination, found it among his great-aunt Adelaide's effects," Lulworth answered. "He showed it to me at lunch one day and told me that I was, besides himself, the only one to see it."

"And he gave the letter to you?"

"Not exactly 'gave' it to me. I saw immediately the value of that missive and swiftly extracted from my inner pocket a letter I had gotten that day from Mavis Pellington, a document full of obscure prattle, but fortuitously written in a hand not unlike that of the departed canon's. Naturally, I took pains to conceal Mavis' letter from my nephew and when he innocently handed over the canon's letter for my examination, I quickly crumpled it in my hand and threw the Pellington woman's worthless scribbling into the fire. Egbert thought I had burned the canon's letter."

"Why on earth would you do that?" snarled Sebastien.

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"Nearly the exact question put to me by Egbert as he watched, wearing the stricken face of a drowning man who has missed the third throw of a life ring. The Pellington letter withered in the flames while I transferred Peter's, now a ball, to the safety of my jacket."

Lulworth now looked directly into Sebastien's glowing eyes. "I remember what I told my nephew when he asked me why I wished to protect a common murderer. I said, 'A common murderer, possibly, but a very uncommon cook'."

Sebastien lowered his eyes to the floor for the longer part of a minute, then raised them, now featureless, and asked, "Shall I serve the *flan de piña* now, sir?"

"This has been a distressing lunchtime, Sebastien," said Sir Lulworth, shaking his head slowly. "But perhaps dessert can salvage a part of it. Yes, do bring in the *flan*."

Events took a near normal course for the next few weeks. A polite but wary relationship was maintained between Lulworth and Sebastien which, while not marked by the warmth and understanding of the past, was sufficient to ensure the proper structuring of menus, the appropriate ordering of supplies, the preparation, serving, and consumption of exquisite meals. Indeed, Sir Lulworth had quite put from his mind the letter and the use he might make of it, reasoning that the remoteness of the latter rendered frivolous its contemplation.

Then one day, between a jellied herb *consommé paysan* and a rack of venison Baden-Baden with *sauce grand veneur,* Sebastien slipped onto the table a bank draft made out in Lulworth's favor.

"What's this?" demanded the knight, fingering distastefully the draft while with wonderment noting its value.

"All the money I owe in the world," replied Sebastien. "I wish to buy my freedom."

"My dear Sebastien," began Lulworth, pushing the draft away from him, "emotions run high, I realise, among those who originate on the French slopes of the Pyrenees, and this can excuse much; for example, your near fatal thrashing of the gardener's boy over the matter of sorrel. But cheap melodrama and vain arrogance are inexcusable in all circumstances in that they place upon those to whom they are directed a burden of understanding and response hardly justified by the motives involved."

"Do you mean that you will not sell me that letter?"

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"This whole conversation is acutely discomfiting and the delay it entails will surely jade my taste for the venison when it comes as well as harden my palate to the *sauce grand veneur*," Lulworth said wearily. "Under the best of circumstances I would give scant attention to your proposal. But under the circumstance of luncheon, when the time separating the soup from the roast stretches out to a point at which it is hopeless to conceive their relationship, any attention is out of the question."

"Sir, it is now a matter of honour," Sebastien pleaded. "My father has no one to take over the restaurant. My brothers have become . . . farmers!" It was evident that Sebastien had difficulty bringing himself to pronounce this last word. "He, my father, will be the town laughingstock if he has to call upon a farmer to carry on the family tradition."

"A certain amount of honour is expected, and even commendable. But to-day's honor is hardly remembered in the working out of to-morrow's compromise," exclaimed Lulworth. "It would appear that a farmer, whose knowledge of foodstuffs in their incipient stages is certainly formidable, would make more than a passing *restaurateur*." He stated this with conviction. "In any case, I will countenance no more conversation *vis-à-vis* that letter. Now, please serve the venison. And take away your draft."

Sebastien picked up the slip of coloured paper and left the room. In a moment he was back with the roast and served Lulworth with three slices of medium thickness and a soupçon of rutabaga and carrot purée. Lulworth noted a pronounced clattering of chinaware during this activity and in the service of the dessert a little later. What he didn't witness was the thrashing administered that afternoon by Sebastien to the gardener's boy, an exercise approximating in intensity the thrashing administered previously, differing only in the respect that there was no discernible provocation for this later act.

Supper that night was cool and accompanied by more clattering of cups and dishes, as was breakfast the next morning.

Lunch was different. As Sebastien wheeled in a serving cart bearing a small covered terrine, Sir Lulworth noted a relaxation in the cook's features, an easing of the previously charged atmosphere. As the cart came closer, he smelled the delicate odor of his favourite celery and beet broth—but with a subtle difference, felt rather than identified. The crafty scoundrel is working his way back into my good graces, gloated Lulworth to himself.

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"Aha, Sebastien, have you done something different with my celery and beet broth?"

"A secret ingredient, sir. You have never tasted this broth quite this way."

"Let me think on this. Did you use a veal instead of a chicken stock?" Lulworth's impatient hand swept this speculation aside. "No, it is surely vegetal. Remove the cover. Ah, there we are! You canny devil, you mixed lettuce cuttings with the minced celery. No? Perhaps the juice of a lime instead of that of a lemon?"

"An herb, sir, from the hillsides near our home." Sebastien's eyes seemed wistful, filled with a faraway scene. "Nowhere else does it grow. It is my father's secret, passed down to me alone, the heir to all his secrets."

Sir Lulworth, who felt a low craving for the broth, said testily, "Well, serve it, Sebastien!"

Instead, Sebastien replaced the cover on the terrine. He looked into Lulworth's unbelieving eyes. "I have thought on my problem, sir. My father's claim on me precedes even the matter of my own safety. Thus, I am leaving your service and will take my chances on escape. Now, I will serve the broth." Whereupon the cook uncovered once more the earthenware jug and ladled out the soup. "This is the last thing I shall serve you."

"Do you propose that *I* serve the pheasant or that Jenkins do so?" Jenkins was Sebastien's assistant charged with nothing more challenging than cleaning up after the cook.

"I didn't prepare the pheasant. I was occupied with packing. I let Jenkins attempt it and he burned it beyond salvaging."

"And the braised chestnuts and Brussels sprouts?"

"The sprouts are soggy. Apparently, Jenkins neglected to dry them on absorbent paper. The chestnuts are a like disaster. He applied the *bouquet garni* cold."

Lulworth shuddered. "You have been cruel, Sebastien, but I am inclined to forgive you solely on the basis of this broth. Tell me, will its taste equal its aroma?" He picked up the soup spoon.

"I doubt that you will ever know, Sir Lulworth. I don't believe you will consume the broth. I poisoned it."

"Poisoned it! Is poison the secret ingredient?"

"Ah, no," Sebastien replied with a little laugh. "*That* is as I described it. The poison is in the nature of an extra ingredient. And it is completely soluble—tasteless, ordorless, undetectable."

"Did you mean to kill me?"

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"Certainly not, sir. If that were my intent, would I tell you in advance of the poison? No, it is enough for me to see you gasping over one of my creations, your tongue all but extruded—to see you the way I've seen you hundreds, perhaps thousands of times—and, in the end, to deny you this new experience." He pointed softly to the broth. "Good day, sir."

After Sebastien had departed the room, Lulworth rose slowly and as slowly went to his study and got Canon Peter's letter from the safe. Back in the dining room, he read it again, shaking his head as he did so. He remembered saying once that a clear soup was a more important factor in life than a clear conscience. Yet, one could not discount the worth of a clear conscience. And how could he go through his remaining time with an unburdened soul if he turned Sebastien over to the authorities, if he denied the residents of that beastly Pyrenean town, and persons who would flock to it, of Sebastien's uncommon skill with saucepan and skillet?

Oh, Sebastien, you wretch, he thought. You have won your freedom. And with a quick final gesture he went to the fireplace and, this time, truly flung the canon's letter into the consuming flames.

He then sat down at table and addressed the broth. Could Sebastien really have poisoned it? Incredible! All that rot about tastelessness and odorlessness and undetectability was probably meant to discourage any attempt, by discreet sampling, to recognize the presence of poison. Yet, perhaps Sebastien *did* poison the soup. If so, the secret ingredient made the broth impossible to reconstruct in a non-lethal form. Oh, the callousness of an artist! Lulworth stifled an unmanly sob. Would he ever, *ever*, taste a broth such as this?

I gave him his life, Lulworth said to himself. Is it fair that I should also give him this petty triumph? Should he have it all his way?

With these thoughts racing through his mind, Sir Lulworth reached, hesitantly at first, then resolutely, for the soup spoon.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Robert C. Schweik's first story, "The Appearance of Fact," was published in the March 1974 issue of EQMM. Nearly three years ago, but his second story was well worth waiting for, since, like the first story, it is also "classical in concept and execution," and it brings back Professor Paul Engel and his bookstore Boswell. Paul Engel belongs to the school of "armchair detectives"—at least, in spirit. His method is to apply pure reason to the facts, a technique that recalls the method used by other fictional professors in the genre—Jacques Futrelle's Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine of earlier days, and Harry Kemelman's Professor Nicholas (Nicky) Welt, of recent days. Like them Paul Engel solves mysteries by analysis and speculation—in this case, by theorizing about two such seemingly unrelated objects as a typed manila envelope and an ordinary thumbtack. This kind of "adventure in deduction" is a welcome refresher and a reminder of "the golden age" . . .

THE THUMBTACK PUZZLE

by ROBERT C. SCHWEIK

The Dean's introduction had been mercifully brief and ended with a conventional flourish: "I now have the honor to present our speaker for today, Dr. Paul Engel, Professor of Bibliography and Textual Evidence here at Northfield State." There was a flurry of scattered applause, but, with scarcely a glance at the audience, Paul Engel rose, strode to the podium, and plunged immediately into his lecture.

"I intend today to illustrate the application of the principle of parsimony to the analysis of manuscripts. That principle, you will recall, dictates that when more than one hypothesis provides an adequate explanation for the same set of facts, the *simplest* hypothesis is the one to be preferred. Now, the key to finding the

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simplest hypothesis often turns on correctly interpreting the relationship of apparently unrelated details to the total problem . . ."

The "hypothesis" I began to ponder was whether the claims of friendship obliged a man to be bored to death. I had left my bookstore closed this morning and, sliding through the ooze of leaves which covered the cut-stone sidewalks of little upstate Northfield, had made my way up the hill to Winslow Hall—just to hear my friend Paul Engel deliver the annual Peabody Lecture on Research Method.

I had met Paul shortly after I had bought up the stock of a Northfield bookstore in an attempt to escape from the rat-race of Manhattan and the aftermath of a bitter divorce. We had found a common bond in our worry about being overweight, and, to avoid lunchtime temptations, had begun to share a can of soup cooked on a hotplate in the rear of my store or in a corner of Paul's cluttered office.

I quickly learned that I could count on Paul as a friend, and I tried my best to overlook the inordinate pride he took in his work as a professional bibliographer—which, so far as I could see, involved him in writing studies of obscure editions and manuscripts that only other bibliographers seemed willing to read. Still, when Paul told me he had been honored by an invitation to give this year's Peabody Lecture, I knew that friendship required me to go—though now, as he droned on, waving a pointer at pictures of manuscripts projected on a screen behind him, I began to have regrets.

". . . you will recall that the problem here is whether leaf 128A was inserted into the manuscript after leaves 128 and 129 were already written. Observe the canceled line at the bottom of 128A and its continuation on . . ."

I'm not sure just when I realized that I could no longer endure Paul's tussle with leaf 128A, but somewhere in the middle of things I found myself gracelessly slouching up the aisle and out into the lobby where I lit my pipe and decided to wait out the rest of the lecture. Across the room a small knot of people, obviously fellow refugees from leaf 128A, were gathered around a huge paunchy man I recognized as Helmut Kleber, a chemist from Heidelberg who was at Northfield State for a semester as part of a new "Distinguished Visiting Research Professor" program.

Kleber had certainly lived up to that title: shortly after his arrival at Northfield State, he had announced that he was near the

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synthesis of a chemical which could be sprayed on ordinary plastic to make it biodegradable. Although I had barely survived college chemistry, even I could see the enormous importance of Kleber's research to world ecology, and when he let it be known that he would not patent his discovery but would put it in the public domain to be freely available on a world-wide basis—well, I confess I almost reversed my earlier dislike of the man. But not quite. I knew too much about Kleber to join in the unstinted local admiration he had basked in since his announcement.

Of course Kleber was regarded as a prize academic catch at little Northfield State, and because Paul chaired a Committee on Faculty Exchanges, the Dean had asked him to help provide any special arrangements Kleber might want. So, over our lunchtime soup, I had learned from Paul's pained accounts more about Kleber's unreasonableness than most people knew. Even before setting foot on the campus he had begun writing to demand VIP treatment—a double office, a specially equipped laboratory, and a full-time graduate assistant. All that for his one-semester stay!

Paul had dutifully worked it all out, and, characteristically, had managed to make arrangements which would help other people. For example, he had learned of an older graduate student named George Adams, who had worked as a chemist in industry before deciding to accept the financial pinch of two more years of graduate school. Paul knew Adams could use the money and persuaded the Chairman of the Chemistry Department to appoint Adams as Kleber's assistant, and, because Adams had practical experience in plastics, the arrangement seemed an ideal one all around.

That is, until Kleber arrived. He made himself a nuisance from the start, and began by taking a fanatical interest in the security of his office—maintaining that the old-fashioned locks on the doors of his special two-room suite in Old Main were inadequate, and installing his own lock on one door and one of those heavy chain guards on the other. Well, of course that meant even the janitorial staff had to ask him for access to clean his office—a job he personally and critically supervised—and in that one step Kleber had managed to alienate an entire building-maintenance crew.

To make matters worse, Kleber was absolutely intolerant of even the slightest deviation from what he regarded as order, and Paul had recently enlivened our lunchtime soup break by a

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hilarious account of how Kleber had called up the campus security police to report finding an unexplained thumbtack on his office floor. In short, he was what Paul charitably called a "difficult" man.

But I think what had most turned me against him was what I had learned from Paul about Kleber's treatment of his assistant—or, I should say, assistants. George Adams had barely worked for him a week when Kleber banished him from his office to the laboratory and demanded another assistant who could type. Paul had to exercise all his charm with a furious Chemistry Department Chairman to persuade him to temporarily relinquish his own assistant, a pretty girl named Ruth Seller, who could type up a storm; but in less than a week Kleber was heard shouting at her in the corridor, "No brains! Only fingers, girl! No brains!" and not long after that she had joined George Adams doing drudge work in Kleber's laboratory down the hall.

Not surprisingly, no more cooperation was forthcoming from the now absolutely livid Chairman of the Chemistry Department, and after sulking a while, Kleber finally sent to Heidelberg for his former assistant. Paul described to me how Karl Schmidt had arrived, exhausted from his hurried transatlantic flight, carrying only a portable typewriter and a hastily packed overnight bag, and how Kleber promptly installed him in his office and set him to typing for the rest of the day before allowing him to look for lodgings. As I say, I knew too much about Kleber to applaud him as a humanitarian.

Now, as I strolled over to where he was standing, I could tell from the tone of his voice and the wildness of his gesticulations that he was indulging in another of his tirades—something to do with Karl Schmidt, I gathered.

"What's wrong with Kleber now?" I whispered to Tristram Barnard, a colleague of Paul's who was standing a little apart from the others. "Did he find another thumbtack?"

"So you heard about that," chuckled Barnard. "Well, this time it seems to be more serious."

I listened a while, trying unsuccessfully to make out what had caused Kleber to carry on so. Finally I drew Barnard aside. "What's it all about?" I asked.

"Well, it's a funny business," Barnard said. "Kleber says that last Thursday he finished his research on that new discovery of his and had instructed Schmidt to type it up to send to the *Jour-*

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nal of Polymer Research at the University of Arizona. Schmidt swears that on Friday he did just that—typed up the article, addressed the envelope, sealed the article in the envelope, and put it on Kleber's desk; then he locked up the office and went home. When Kleber came in this morning, he took the envelope down to the mail room and was about to hand it in when he decided to open it to add a personal note to the editor.

"In the process he glanced over the paper and discovered a couple of crucial places where the formula had been erroneously stated—so much so, in fact, that he claims the paper he had been about to send was professionally embarrassing and actually worthless. Of course Kleber blames the whole thing on Schmidt, and from what I gather, Schmidt is already packing up to go back home. Kleber vows he'll make it impossible for Schmidt to ever get another university position in Germany—and I believe he'll do it too."

Just then we were interrupted by the sound of mild applause from inside the auditorium, and moments later those hardy souls who had stayed to the end of Paul's lecture came out looking, to my eye at least, more or less dazed. Paul, I knew, would be waiting for me in his office for our lunchtime soup. Of course he would surely ask me how I liked his lecture, and I began to think of ways to steer our conversation away from that embarrassing topic.

When I arrived at his office I found there was already a welcome diversion at hand. Paul was hunched over a curious flashlight-and-magnifying-glass device through which he was studying a large manila envelope.

"Have a look at this, will you, Harry?" he said when I came in. "It's an envelope I asked Helmut Kleber to let me examine after he flew into a rage this morning in the mail room." And with that he went through the whole story I had just heard from Tristram Barnard. Of course I couldn't interrupt him because I didn't want to explain just where and when I had heard the story before, and he had almost reached the end when he was interrupted by a sharp rap on the door, followed at once by Kleber himself who abruptly came in, sniffed the aroma of our oxtail soup, and made an unpleasant face.

"Well, Engel, what do you think you found?" he asked in a condescending tone.

"It's very interesting," Paul began, ignoring Kleber's rudeness.

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"Firm even strokes, no traces of erasure or overtyping, and definitely done on Schmidt's typewriter—"

"Well, Engel, I don't need you to tell me what I already know," Kleber interrupted with a sneer, and without so much as a "thank you," he turned on his heel and stalked out.

Paul and I looked at one another for a moment. "Nice man," I finally said, but Paul merely nodded and seemed to be musing over Kleber's envelope again. After a moment he fixed me with a shrewd look and asked, "Well, Harry, what did you think of my lecture this morning?"

The question came so unexpectedly that I felt trapped. "Well, I think it went pretty well," I fumbled, and wracked my brain for any point that might suggest I had been paying attention. "Of course it was a little difficult for me to follow in places, and I don't think I really saw your point about the simplest hypothesis . . ."

As I trailed off lamely, Paul cleared his throat, and I began to fear that I was in for another explanation of leaf 128A; so out of desperation I grasped for the nearest conversational straw.

"For example," I said, "how would that apply to what happened to Kleber today?"

Paul gave me a puzzled look, and now that I had stumbled into it, there seemed nothing to do but go on.

"Well, what I mean is, suppose you were trying to find some connection between two utterly unrelated things—like Kleber's problem with his letter and, say, that thumbtack he made such a fuss about a week ago? Wouldn't finding such a connection be just an exercise in ingenuity? And what would be the use of trying?"

"Well, none, of course, if what you imply is true," Paul answered. "But suppose there *is* a connection. How would you ever perceive it unless you deliberately tried to formulate some hypothesis that would bring the two seemingly unrelated objects together?"

"But I don't see—" I began

"Well, look at it this way," Paul interrupted. "What was that thumbtack doing on Kleber's office floor?"

"Why, someone dropped it, I suppose."

"Yes, but who? In what circumstances?"

"Come on, Paul," I complained. "How can any of us know that? It might have been one of the janitors—or Kleber himself did it absent-mindedly—or Schmidt. Who knows? And who cares?"

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"Of course you're right there, Harry," Paul went on soothingly. "By itself the thumbtack is hardly worth paying attention to. But in connection with something like Kleber's letter this morning, it could appear in a different light. Suppose—just suppose, mind you—that someone had deliberately wanted to have Kleber mail off a worthless formula."

"You mean as a kind of practical joke?" I asked. "To get back at him for some personal insult?"

"Possible, but not too likely, Harry," Paul replied. "The risks were just too great and the timing would have to have been exact. If someone had wanted to carry off such a scheme, it would have been necessary to keep really careful watch on the progress of Kleber's work, to know when it had been finally prepared for publication, and, most of all, it would have required the ingenuity to get repeatedly into and out of Kleber's office without being caught."

"But what other—" I began to protest.

"Money, of course," Paul went on, "would be the obvious motive. Remember that every chemical company, big or small, could profit tremendously by getting a head start in producing Kleber's formula—and I've no doubt that some would go so far as to attempt to patent it, even at the risk of a certain court battle. All that would be necessary to sell the formula would be a little time during which Kleber would not have his suspicions aroused.

"So—consider the number of weeks it would take for Kleber's paper to go through the mails to that journal in Arizona, where it would then be sent out to referees, who would have to find time to read it, prepare reports on it, then return the paper with the reports to the journal, and, finally, have all that sent back through the mail to Kleber—who would then find out for the first time that something was amiss with his paper. By that time the formula could be in the hands of some chemical company that would have paid well for the advantage—and no questions asked. From what I've read about current practices in industrial espionage, someone could make a tidy sum out of this."

"Paul," I said, trying to keep my annoyance from showing in my voice, "you've gotten way off the track. What's all this got to do with Kleber's *thumbtack*?"

"Just this," replied Paul. "If we accept for a moment the hypothesis I've been advancing, see how nicely it explains Kleber's thumbtack."

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I squirmed a bit as Paul began to slip into that annoying professorial manner of his, but I couldn't for the life of me see what he was driving at.

"Look, Harry," Paul went on, "I think you'd agree that we're not likely to be dealing with the kind of person who has access to tools like picklocks, and how many professional thieves are there, do you suppose, who have the technical knowledge in plastics chemistry to doctor a formula the way Kleber's was? But how would an ordinary person—I should say, an ingenious person—manage to get in and out of Kleber's office without the entry being detected?"

I was about to suggest the window when I realized that the soggy weather we had been having would have made it nearly impossible to avoid leaving tracks outside or on Kleber's floor. I had to confess I still couldn't see Paul's point.

"Well, it's not nearly so difficult as you might think," Paul went on, "thanks to Kleber's own foolishness in securing one of his doors with that chain guard he installed. People tend to think of them as nearly foolproof hindrances to entry, but they're not. Among other things they can easily be cut, of course, but our prowler had to leave the chain intact. One clever solution to that problem would be to resort to a trick with a thumbtack and something like a strong rubber band.

"If the door itself were locked, it could easily be opened with a skeleton key. Then all that is necessary is to reach your hand in, use a common thumbtack to fasten a rubber band to the door or wall, and stretch the other end over the nub at the end of the chain that slides into the door fastening. When you close the door, the rubber band pulls the sliding part of the chain out of the holder and, presto, you're in!"

"But wouldn't anyone clever enough to do that be careful not to leave any traces?" I asked.

"Of course," Paul agreed, "but remember we're probably not dealing with an experienced thief, and when you consider that whoever it was must have employed that means to sneak into Kleber's office a number of times at night, and using as little light as possible—well, I can see that, even with considerable care, a rubber band might unexpectedly snap or fly out of sight, or a thumbtack fall, skip away, and be lost. And if that happened, what are the chances that someone would theorize about a thumbtack the way we are doing now?"

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I pondered that and it suddenly occurred to me that Paul had overlooked a point that destroyed his entire theory. "I can see all that," I remarked as casually as I could, "but that would only work for getting *into* Kleber's office. Remember, the chain guard would have to be locked again before the thief left, so how did the thief *get out*?" I sat back in my chair with a satisfied sense that I had put a wrench into the whole elaborate machinery Paul had been constructing, but Paul did not seem disturbed.

"No problem there," he said. "The other door of Kleber's office is fitted with a tumbler lock that no doubt would be a challenge to anyone trying to *get in*; but for convenience' sake nearly all those have a knob-and-button arrangement on the inside that can be used both to open the lock and to keep it in an open position when it's not necessary for the door to be locked. I suspect our prowler used that and simply walked out Kleber's *other* door—being careful to let the lock snap behind him."

"Well, I suppose it could have been done that way," I admitted. "But who around here would get involved in such a business?"

"That's even easier to answer," responded Paul. "It would have to be someone with easy access to the building at night, someone who knew enough about Kleber's research to doctor his paper just enough to make it worthless but not obviously implausible, and someone familiar with the layout of Kleber's office."

"The only ones with those qualifications are Schmidt and Kleber's two previous assistants," I suggested.

"Well, there are some members of the chemistry faculty who could qualify," Paul mused, "but, furious as they are about Kleber, I think I can vouch for their characters. They would no more steal a man's formula than shoot him—and, in fact, from what I know of academic integrity, I seriously believe they'd be far more likely to commit murder than academic theft."

I felt myself getting into the spirit of the game now. "We can also eliminate Schmidt," I ventured, "because he'd have a key to Kleber's office and wouldn't need to use the trick with the thumbtack and rubber band."

"Right, Harry," replied Paul. "And I think we could also eliminate Ruth Seller because she's a first-rate typist—"

"Wait a minute," I interjected. "Seems to me that would make her a prize candidate. After all, we're assuming that someone typed changes in Kleber's manuscript and typed up a new envelope."

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"That's exactly why we can eliminate her," Paul went on. "Remember, it was Schmidt's typewriter that was used."

I had to confess that again I had lost the thread of Paul's reasoning.

"Well," he explained, "the point is that it's a German typewriter. Except for some special keys set off to the right, the keyboard of a German typewriter looks precisely like ours; but from the exasperating experience I had as a visiting professor at Munich, I can testify that for a trained typist there's a booby trap in it. The positions of the Y and Z keys are reversed, and any American not used to a German typewriter will invariably hit the wrong keys. An expert typist addressing that envelope would at first have typed *Polzmer* for *Polymer, Universitz* for *University,* and *Ariyona* for *Arizona*, and habit would make it almost certain that the error would be repeated at least once even if there was time to type a second envelope.

"But the envelope we have here shows no corrections at all. That means it was probably typed by someone using the hunt-and-peck system where you look at the keyboard to find the right key each time; for such a person the reversed positions of the *Y* and *Z* keys would make no practical difference. Our culprit has to be George Adams."

For a moment I sat back, trying to take it all in. Finally I said, "Well, what are we going to do now? Shouldn't we tell Kleber, or notify the police—"

"Now wait a minute, Harry," Paul interrupted. "Don't you remember how all this began? We were just *speculating* how a hypothesis could make sense out of apparently disconnected matters. If we were to go to the police, what would we say? Something like, 'Excuse me, but we think you should arrest a fellow named George Adams. Why? Well, he isn't a trained typist, and there was this thumbtack on Professor Kleber's floor.' You can imagine how far we'd get with that! And besides, even if we're right, Adams hasn't done anything really damaging yet. You don't sell this kind of thing by mail, so we can be certain that whatever copy of Kleber's formula Adams has, it is still here in Northfield. Let's sleep on it and see what happens."

The next day Paul appeared at the bookstore for our lunchtime soup carrying a manila envelope and looking pleased with himself. When we were alone at the back of the store, I asked him if he had decided what to do about George Adams.

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"It's all taken care of, Harry," he smiled, pointing to the envelope. I've got Adams' copy of the formula."

"How in the world did you manage that?" I asked, feeling as if I had just seen a magician pull a rabbit out of a hat.

"Sheer bluff." Paul grinned. "This morning I saw Adams walking toward the bus depot with a suitcase in his hand. I had to assume he was going off to peddle Kleber's formula, so I just casually joined him, and as we walked along I talked as if I knew everything he was up to."

"What did Adams do?"

"Well, for a moment he looked as if he were going to faint on the spot, especially when I described how he'd been getting into and out of Kleber's office. But he pulled himself together, and by the time we'd reached the depot I had persuaded him that if he would give me whatever copies of Kleber's formula he had I'd keep the matter quiet—on the condition that he got on the bus and didn't come back. You know, he actually thanked me!"

"Do you plan to tell Kleber?" I asked.

"Not on your life!" Paul laughed. "I did tell the Chairman of the Chemistry Department just enough to let him know that George Adams wasn't going to be with us any more, and I took the occasion to remind him that Karl Schmidt would probably be free to accept an interim appointment. He seemed willing to consider that, and, you know, there would be a certain poetic justice in Schmidt becoming the beneficiary of Adams' hasty departure."

"What about the envelope?" I asked. "Will you return that to Kleber?"

"Yes," replied Paul, "but in my own way. I'll just send it to him in the mail and enjoy the ruckus he'll raise trying to puzzle out what's been going on. I'm betting he won't come close."

"No bet," I said, and sat back in my chair smiling in anticipation of the fuss Kleber would make. "Come to think of it, Paul," I remarked finally, "Schmidt is not the only one who will be getting what he deserves."

But by that time Paul was engrossed in the lobster bisque I had prepared, and I left him undisturbed to savor the outcome of the Kleber puzzle in his own way.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

A. J. Raffles, the suave, immaculate, debonair gentleman-crook, resumes his criminal career as a cricketer-cracksman, this time in Simla, India, and once again there is a famous figure in the background—a person whose importance Raffles and his companion-in-crime, Bunny Manders, did not foresee . . . the turn of the century in lovely, loving detail, with a surprise at the end, and another surprise after that . . .

RAFFLES AND THE SHERE KHAN POUCH

by BARRY PEROWNE

The famous resort of Simla, commandingly situated on a ridge 7000 feet up in the rhododendron forests of the Himalayan foothills, was the summer capital of the Viceroy of India.

"It's now about nine o'clock," remarked A. J. Raffles to myself, Bunny Manders, on the evening we arrived, "so we're in good time for dinner."

With the Viceroy in residence at Viceregal Lodge, Simla was a centre of social importance, a circumstance which we hoped we might turn to our monetary advantage, and we had booked rooms in advance at the fashionable Peliti's Hotel.

Unfortunately, when we dressed for dinner and descended to the dining-room, we found it thronged with ladies and gentlemen of obvious consequence, and we were told by the turbaned head waiter, tall and dignified in white with a crimson sash, that no table was available for us.

"But surely," Raffles demurred, his keen face tanned, his dark hair crisp, "that's a vacant table over there by that potted palmetto?"

That table, the head waiter explained, was reserved.

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"For a lady of great learning," he said, giving us a significant look, "who has come here to the hills to recuperate from the heat of Madras."

Adding that he would see what he could do for us, he moved away, and I noticed that on the table reserved for the lady from Madras, and on that table only, was a fine alabaster bowl in which floated the green leaves and waxen blossoms of the revered water-lily of India—the white lotus.

Raffles and I exchanged speculative glances.

Returning, the head waiter told us that he had made an arrangement on our behalf and he conducted us to a table at which a man was dining alone.

Of tropically seasoned complexion, with closely trimmed brown hair but rather bushy moustache and eyebrows, he folded a newspaper and set it aside as he rose courteously to greet us.

"But, sir," Raffles protested, "we intrude upon you!"

"On the contrary," replied the diner, "you deliver me from reading at table, a deplorable practice. Do sit down."

He was English and, despite his mature manner, I judged him to be no older than twenty, if that. Though he wore thick-lensed glasses, his eyes, bright blue, were observant, for he commented, when Raffles and I had made our selections from the menu, that the fresh air of the hills evidently had given us an appetite.

"After the jungle heat," he said, "of Nawanagar." And, seeing our surprise, he smiled. "I saw you arrive this evening and I guessed where you'd come from, because I noticed a cricket-bag among your luggage. I happen to know that Kumar Shri Ranjitsinjhi, cousin of the ruler of the princely Indian state of Nawanagar, had brought out a party of cricketers from England."

"You're perfectly right," Raffles said. "I met Ranji when I played in a cricket match against Cambridge University, where he's an undergraduate at Trinity College. He invited us to join the party he was bringing to India for the vacation. He and the other fellows are on their way back to England now, for the start of the Cambridge term. But my friend here and I, being under no such obligation, thought it would be a pity to miss a visit to Simla."

"I come up here every year myself, on leave from this Lahore sheet, the *Civil and Military Gazette*," said our fellow diner, tapping the newspaper he had laid aside. "The editor, having a staff of only two of us to help him fill his columns, stimulates our out-

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put by letting us sign our more sparkling efforts with our initials, and he allows us six weeks' annual leave. My colleague and I, being friendly rivals, take it in turns to come up to Simla at a time when the Viceroy's in residence and there are parties to go to, ladies to flirt with, and perhaps, with luck, a story or two to be picked up."

The young journalist looked at us thoughtfully and asked, "Did your friend Ranjitsinjhi happen to say anything to you about the Shere Khan mystery?"

"I recall nothing of the kind," said Raffles.

"There's an aspect of the matter," said the young journalist, "that in these troubled times, when the Russian bear to our north has a jealous eye on India, makes the Shere Khan mystery an affair of State, an affair of concern to the British Raj. It's common knowledge that not only is the Viceroy worried about it, but so is the Secretary of State for India, at the India Office in London. It's a strange matter."

While we dined, the journalist from Lahore explained to Raffles and me that Shere Khan was the name by which folk down in jungle country referred to the enemy they most feared—tigers.

"There exists," said our informant, "a corps of élite couriers known as Queen's Messengers." He glanced at a conspicuous portrait of our widowed Queen-Empress on the wall of the dining-room. "They travel in civilian clothes, and their insignia, worn under the lapel, is a silver greyhound. Armed with diplomatic immunity, these élite couriers carry across the world the sealed pouches of secret correspondence that pass constantly to and fro between Her Majesty's statesmen in London and her pro-consuls overseas."

Recently, the young man from Lahore told us, a train in which a Queen's Messenger on mission had been travelling to Bombay, there to board a liner due to sail for England, had chanced to be derailed in jungle country.

The train had been carrying remounts for a cavalry detachment, so the courier had requisitioned one of the horses. On this, in the full heat of the noon-day sun, he had ridden off post-haste along a trail through the jungle towards a railway junction where he hoped to connect with another train.

"But," said our fellow diner, "at a certain point alongside that jungle trail one of the yellow-eyes tribe, the tribe of Shere Khan, lurked in the striped shade of a thicket."

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"And tigers," Raffles said, "are blind to diplomatic immunity?"

"Precisely," said our fellow diner. "The tragedy was discovered later by a sergeant of police, a man of unquestioned integrity. Shere Khan and the Queen's Messenger had died together, the courier with his head torn half off and the tiger with five bullets in him from the courier's revolver. But the sealed mail-pouch and the silver greyhound insignia were gone, and the offer of a reward has brought no response. Hence the—"

He broke off abruptly. I followed his glance. The hum of conversation in the dining-room had waned. Between the curtains of rich red velvet that framed the doorway, a woman was entering. A small woman, with the grey hair of one in her late fifties, she wore a white *sari*.

The turbaned head waiter received her with marked deference and, towering over her, escorted her to the table by the palmetto. As they passed close by us, I saw her face clearly, a face worn and sallow but of a haunting distinction, with light, strange, wide-set eyes.

She seated herself, the head waiter holding the chair for her, at the table with the alabaster bowl in which floated the water-lily, flower of meditation, the white lotus.

"Philosopher, traveller, adept of the occult," the young man from Lahore murmured to us. "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, of New York, Madras, and Tibet."

Fifteen years ago, the journalist told us as the hum of conversation resumed in the dining-room, Madame Blavatsky had made an extraordinary journey. She had travelled over the high Himalayan passes of perpetual snow and been admitted into the closed country of Tibet. There she was said to have studied with men of rare knowledge, thinkers who claimed insight into the nature of Good and Evil by means of a practical mysticism transmitted through the ages.

"Nowadays," said our dinner acquaintance, "Madame Blavatsky divides her time between New York and Madras, where she's founded a phalanstery, a place for thought. She's said to have remarkable intuitive powers and to have achieved feats of divination by means of leaves of the tea-plant. There's been much talk, some affirmative, some sceptical, of the Teacups of Madame Blavatsky. But read her book, *Isis Unveiled*."

He told us that we might find a copy of it here in Simla at the

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shop of an unusual Englishman, long resident in the Orient, called Rancil Kyff.

"He's recently returned, I believe, from a visit to the China coast, where he often travels in search of valuable curios," said the young journalist with the glasses.

He dabbed his napkin to the eaves of his moustache.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," he said, "as I've finished dinner before you, I'm going over to the barracks to smoke a postprandial pipe with three infantry privates I know, inseparable cronies, one of them an Irishman full of good soldier yarns. See you to-morrow, perhaps."

"He's wide-awake, Bunny, that journalist," said Raffles, as the young man left us. "I see he's discarded his newspaper, so I'll commandeer it to read later. To-morrow we'll see if we can find weightier reading matter at Mr. Rancil Kyff's shop." He gave me a wicked look. "Who knows? We may be able to get a glimpse of his valuable curios."

"Shh!" I said uncomfortably, and glanced to see if Madame Blavatsky was looking at us.

But she seemed lost in thought, gazing at the white lotus.

Next morning we found Rancil Kyff's establishment. It was in one of the streets off the principal mall of Simla, the Ladies' Mile, where rickshaw chaps sped to and fro, pulling sun-helmeted Army officers and Civil Secretariat bureaucrats about their business. Over the white domes and Mogul-arched doors and windows of Viceregal Lodge, guarded by tall, turbaned Lancers, flew the standard of the Raj, showing that the Viceroy was in residence. As we knew, he had his troubles. Remote to the north, over the hills and chasms of the rhododendron forest, the Himalayan peaks loomed snow-capped against the blue of the sky.

Most of the streets of Simla, on its ridge, seemed to end in ravines, and Rancil Kyff's place, a tottering old two-storey building, backed upon the edge of such a ravine, at the dead end of a side street. Over the bead-curtained doorway of his shop, which had his name on its jalousied windows, hung a brass sign in the shape of a coiled cobra with reared head and inflated hood.

We went into the shop. Higgledy-piggledy in the tawny interior were screens, divans, images, gongs, palanquins, jade ornaments, ivory chess-sets, peacock-tail fans, opium pipes, and other things—and also two customers and Mr. Kyff himself, as I immediately guessed him to be, for he was behind the mahogany

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counter and holding forth in a high-pitched, dogmatic voice like that of an English schoolmaster's.

Tall, skinny, and parchment-coloured, with a vulturine bald head, he was lecturing, with gestures of a ribboned pince-nez, to a seated lady elegantly dressed and a dashing-looking Army officer with crinkly, well-barbered hair greying at the temples. Helmet in hand, his scarlet tunic, white jodhpurs, and glittering spurs a pleasure to behold, the officer was standing at the lady's side, smoking a cheroot.

" 'Sick' pearls," Mr. Kyff was saying, "as they are commonly called, my dear Major and Mrs. Cambray—" He broke off, holding up his pince-nez for an impatient look at Raffles and me, and said curtly, "Yes?"

"Books?" said Raffles.

"Up those stairs," snapped Mr. Kyff, and as we went up a short flight of stairs to a gallery landing lined to the ceiling with shelves crammed untidily with books, Mr. Kyff resumed his discourse to his customers.

"Pearls," I heard him continue, "are like the ocean that engenders them, capricious and mutable. The condition vulgarly termed, with reference to their loss of lustre, their 'sickness' is curious but not infrequent."

"It's not my *pearls* that are 'sick,' Mr. Kyff," said Mrs. Cambray. "As I explained to you yesterday, when my husband persuaded me to consult you, it's *I* who am made sick by my pearls. The necklace was a gift from my late father, Rear-Admiral of the Far East Fleet, but just recently I find myself unable to wear my rope of pearls without unsightly blemishes appearing on my neck."

"Mrs. Cambray," said Mr. Kyff, "I've subjected your pearls to intense scrutiny. Reluctantly, I must confess I'm unable to account for the phenomenon you describe. It's unique in my experience."

On the gallery landing, I glanced sidelong at Raffles. Like myself, he was pretending to look at books, his back to the three persons in the shop below, while listening with understandable curiosity to their conversation.

"My wife," Major Cambray was saying, "has sought counsel of the best doctor in Simla—Colonel Jeremiah Jebb himself, Director of Army Medical Services, Punjab Area."

"Lionel, I regard Colonel Jebb," said Mrs. Cambray, "as quite

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useless. All he did was pinch my neck, stroke his whiskers, and mumble about physical stigmata stemming from queer fancies women are apt to get when they—well, reach a certain state in life. How absurd of him to tell me, 'It's all in the *mind*, Mrs. Cambray!' "

"Well, I'm no medical quack," Major Cambray admitted, "but as the blemishes fade away in a day or two if you don't wear your pearls, Dorothy, it sticks out a mile to me, as a layman, that the damned things curdle your metabolism or whatever it is you women have. So my advice to you, frankly, is to get rid of that necklace—sell the damned thing."

"Sell it to whom, pray? Every lady in Simla was jealous of my necklace, but now they all cringe away from it with repugnance."

"Well, you shouldn't have yapped so much about your problem, Dorothy!"

"What absolute nonsense, Lionel! The only person I mentioned my blotches to, in strict confidence, was the Judge-Advocate-General's wife, Lady Royelme. How was I to know a lawyer's wife, of all people, would blab it all over Simla? One lives and learns. In future, I shall keep my own counsel. Actually, of course, I'd intended that Ella should have my pearl rope as an engagement present. Mr. Kyff, I may tell you, in strict confidence, that Major Cambray and I are on the eve of announcing the engagement of our only daughter Ellaline to Lieutenant Peter Pemberton, Bengal Lancers, *aide-de-camp* to the Viceroy."

"Dorothy," barked Major Cambray, "you can't fob off your necklace on Ella. She's got a horror of it. She doesn't want to go up the aisle with blotches under her veil."

"Mrs. Cambray," said Mr. Kyff, "perhaps I may make a suggestion. I have your necklace here in my safe—"

I heard the jingle of a key-ring—and my scalp suddenly tingled as I noticed that Raffles, at the mention of a safe, began drifting along, apparently absorbed in a book he held, towards a point on the gallery landing from which he might be able to steal a quick look down, over the banister, at Mr. Kyff's side of the counter below.

I plucked another book at random from the shelves and, staring at it unseeingly, listened to Mr. Kyff saying, "Your unique problem fascinates me, Mrs. Cambray. It challenges me in a professional sense. I would like to devote further study to these pearls, and, at the same time, help you in your dilemma. So I'm prepared

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to take a chance. Now, here is your necklace. In the case with it you'll find a note of the best price—hard cash, in rupees—that I feel I dare offer you for it, all things considered."

"By God, Dorothy," Major Cambray exclaimed, "it's damned sporting of Mr. Kyff to make an offer at all, in the circumstances! You'd better think this over carefully."

Mrs. Cambray, sounding relieved and grateful, said that indeed she would do so; and, assuring Mr. Kyff that they would be in touch with him on the morrow, the Cambrays departed.

"Well, Bunny," said Raffles, who had drifted back along the gallery landing to my side, "what's that book you've found?"

I looked at the title of the book in my hands. With an odd sense of psychic discomfort, I saw that the book was *Isis Unveiled*, by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

We bought the book and two that Raffles had chosen, and left Mr. Kyff's shop.

"On the whole, Bunny," said Raffles, "a rewarding visit. I got a look at Kyff's safe. It's under his counter. It's a fairly good safe. When he opened it to take out Mrs. Cambray's necklace-case, I got a glimpse of other things in the safe—including a tray of gemstones, some in settings, some not. The unset stones are all rubies."

We were coming out again on to the Ladies' Mile, where the rickshaws were speeding to and fro.

"Our journalist acquaintance from Lahore," said Raffles, "told us that Kyff's a traveller and not long returned from a trip to the China coast. I think he must also have visited Burma, where the world's best rubies are mined—and where there's a flourishing trade in illicitly acquired stones. Now, if I remember rightly, I noticed in one of the other side streets off the Ladies' Mile a jeweller's shop. We've time to drop in there before tiffin, as they seem to call lunch in Simla. I want to see if we can buy a reasonably good ruby—unset."

"*Buy* one?" I said, astonished.

"A sprat to catch a mackerel, I hope," Raffles explained. "It'll require finesse to get Rancil Kyff's safe open, Bunny. I think a ruby might be helpful to us—to-night."

In Raffles' pockets, when we slipped out of Peliti's Hotel that night by way of a balcony that ran along under the windows on our side of the building, were an unset Burmese ruby and six silk scarves he had bought.

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From the balcony, steps led down to a terrace, and from this we gained the street without anyone in the hotel knowing that we no longer were in our rooms.

It was very late. From the military cantonments a bugle had long ago sounded the last of the day's calls: "Lights Out." Hatless, in evening-dress, we walked without haste, like gentlemen who had dined late and were taking the air under the stars. Except for a passing policeman, who touched his turban to us, and a chattering party of ladies in ballgowns and gentlemen in mess-jackets, we saw nobody.

At the ravine end of the side street, Rancil Kyff's tottering old building, with its sign of the cobra, was in darkness.

"The doors will be bolted, of course," Raffles said, "but let's see where that opening at the side of the building leads us."

The opening was a sandy path. Here we tied silk scarves triangularly over our faces. A pi-dog darted past us, snarling. It had been regaling itself at Kyff's dustbin, outside his side door. Raffles tried the door. It was bolted. The path terminated in a brick wall topped by spikes. Raffles pulled himself up by the spikes, and peered over the wall.

"Bunny," he whispered, dropping down beside me, "there's a narrow space between the rear wall of the building and the edge of the ravine. I noticed, this morning, that at the rear end of that gallery landing where the books are there's a small window. It looks directly out over the ravine, and is so cobwebby that I think it may be permanently ajar. Let's see if we can get to it."

We negotiated the spiked wall without difficulty, but when I saw the sheer drop to the ravine, my stomach turned over. The space between the rear wall of the building and the ravine edge was weedy and was barely a foot wide. Raffles started inching along it, his face to the wall.

I followed. There was nothing to provide a handhold, and the thought that the ground might crumble under our feet made sweat prickle out all over me. I was not built to be a human fly. My calf-muscles twitched uncontrollably. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Raffles pause, peering up. Rather more than arm's reach above his head was a window sill.

He crouched slightly, leaped up, got a grip on the sill, heaved himself higher. I saw him pushing at the casement frame. The window must indeed have been ajar, for I heard the slight creak of hinges. Then he was in, and, leaning out again, he gave me a

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hand to scramble in after him. "Listen," he breathed.

I listened. I could hear only the throbbing of my own heart and, from somewhere not far off, the trumpeting of an elephant, probably staked and chained in the Army Transport Corps lines. Faint starlight from the window showed me that we were on the gallery landing. At this rear end of it, there were bookshelves on both sides. These gave way, on the right and further along, to the banister, below which was the cluttered shop, all dark. I felt something silken thrust into my hand.

"Scarves," Raffles whispered, "to bind, gag, and blindfold Kyff when I give you the signal. Now, I'm going down into the shop. I noticed this morning that there's a bell over the street door. I'm going to make that bell jangle as though someone outside had jerked the bellpull. When Kyff appears—his bedroom's obviously not on this book landing—we'll see if the plan I have in mind works. Meantime, keep watch from this landing, and be quick with those scarves when I signal you."

He was gone, soundless. I crouched against the landing banister, peering down into the shop. I could see nothing of its cluttered wares. Not for the first time, I marvelled at Raffles' ability, once he had seen a place in the light, to feel his way about it subsequently in the dark.

Suddenly the bell jangled—a peremptory, startling alarm. After a moment it jangled again. I heard a sound of thumping. This puzzled me. Again the bell jangled. I heard a muffled shout. The truth flashed upon me. *It was not Raffles who was ringing the bell.* Someone in the street was jerking the bellpull and pounding on the door.

As the bell continued jangling, light appeared. So did Kyff. He was carrying an oil-lamp. I peered down at him between the banister rails. The top of his head gleamed, vulture-bald, as he crossed the shop. He wore a red silk robe with a golden cobra embroidered on the back. Shadows wheeled over the divans, screens, gongs, and whatnots. Raffles had disappeared.

Kyff stopped before the bead curtain that hung over the street door. Above the door, the bell on its spring was jumping and jangling.

"Who's there?" said Kyff.

"Cambray," a voice shouted back.

Kyff swept aside the bead curtain, unbolted the door, opened it. Major Lionel Cambray lurched in, hatless, gorgeous in a scarlet

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mess-jacket with a row of medals on it. Dashingly handsome, but flushed and unsteady on his feet, he blew a great cloud of cigar-smoke as Kyff closed the street door.

"You're drunk," said Kyff. "You stink like a distillery."

"I've had the honour," said Major Cambray, "of taking wine with the Viceroy. He dined with us in our Mess to-night. But that's none of your business, Kyff. I'm here to get down to brass tacks with you about this offer you've made for my wife's pearlsh."

"Is she going to accept the offer?"

"Yes, she is. Your scheme's worked. She'll be bringing the necklace to you to-morrow—which is why I've got to have it out with you to-night. Kyff, that offer you've made is nowhere near the value of Dorothy's bloody heirloom!"

"The whole point of the scheme, Major, is that the difference between the real value and the price I've offered approximately equals the sum of the money I've lent you from time to time."

"But you're getting a damn sight too much interest on your money!"

"Major, I'm a business man. Unlike you," said Kyff, in his high-pitched, dogmatic lecturer's voice, "I'm not a ladies' man. I don't maintain expensive mistresses. I advise you to curb your extra-marital activities."

"What does a moulting vulture like you know about that?" shouted Cambray, incensed. "Kyff, I tell you straight—I don't like your necklace offer."

"Then I'll withdraw it—and you can pay me in cash."

"Don't talk so daft! You know damned well I can't pay you in cash. The only valuable thing left in the family is Dorothy's necklace. Otherwise, would I have let you talk me into your dirty dodge? Would I have pussyfooted around in my wife's bedroom at night so that I could get at her pearls and dip 'em in that noxious stuff you gave me?"

"Major, I paid the best professional beggar in the Orient good money for the secret of that stuff. Used lavishly, it produces sores that look hideous enough to wring alms from the compassionate. Used in the weak solution I gave you, it merely induces mild, ephemeral blemishes. As I explained to you, all you have to do, after each occasion your wife's worn her pearls, is get at them again, wash them in cold water, and return them to the necklace case."

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"You glib fakir!" yelled Cambray. "You talked me into this, damn you! By God, the Viceroy made an inspiring speech to us in the Mess to-night, and it made me realise that it's a bloody awful thing for an officer of the Raj and a gentleman by birth to tiptoe around in his own wife's bedroom at night with a beaker of that beggar's brew. I can't stand the dishonour of it. Kyff, unless you improve on your offer, the only decent thing left to me is to shoot myself."

"Pot-valiant bluster, Major. I've heard quite enough of it. I'll expect you and your wife to-morrow—*with* the necklace." Lamp in one hand, Kyff opened the door with the other. "Now, out you go, Major! *Out!*"

As Kyff pushed Cambray out into the night, I glimpsed Raffles. He stepped out from behind a huge temple-gong, down there in the shop, put something on the floor, stepped back again behind the gong.

Kyff closed the street door and shot the bolts. He turned, lamp in hand, and started back across the shop. Suddenly he stopped. I saw him staring down at something that flashed fiery red in the light of his lamp. It was a ruby. He picked it up. It shot glittering rays from his long fingers as he examined it. A thought seemed to strike him: had someone been at his safe?

He went quickly behind the counter, set the lamp down on it, and slid aside a wooden panel under the counter. Peering down on him between the banister rails, I saw the safe. He tried the lever. The safe seemed firmly closed. He hesitated for a moment, then snatched up the lamp, and vanished with it through the doorway from which he had first appeared.

The shop was dark. The thump of my heart measured the seconds. Kyff reappeared. He evidently had gone to get his key-ring from wherever he kept it hidden, for the keys were in his hand, together with a revolver. He put the lamp and the revolver on the counter, stooped, then with shaking fingers selected a key, thrust it into the keyhole of the safe, depressed the lever, and pulled open the heavy door. And Raffles was on him, from behind.

Hand clamped over Kyff's mouth, Raffles whirled him round, out from behind the counter, thrust him face down onto one of the divans and held him there with a knee in the small of his back and a hand pressing Kyff's face into the cushions.

Raffles glanced up at the gallery landing. I knew my cue. I vaulted the banister, landed on the counter, sprang to the floor. With

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the silk scarves, I bound Kyff's wrists, gagged him, blindfolded him, tied his ankles.

Raffles nodded approval. We went to the open safe. Raffles lifted out the tray of gemstones and put it on the counter.

Among the gemstones was an incongruous object. We saw it simultaneously. For an instant it struck us motionless.

It was a silver greyhound.

We looked at each other over our scarf-masks. Raffles took the lamp from the counter, dropped on one knee, and peered into the safe. I peered over his shoulder. Tucked away at the back of the safe was a leather pouch. Raffles took it out. The thick pouch, tightly tied with red tape, bore the stencilled address *H.M. Under-Secretary of State, India Office, London*. The tape was prominently sealed in four places. Impressed in the red wax were the initials V.R. surmounted by a crown.

The seals were unbroken.

I was stunned by the chances of life. If the young journalist from Lahore had not told us of the tragic encounter between Shere Khan and the Queen's Messenger, the silver greyhound insignia would have meant nothing to us. We should have taken Kyff's rubies and a quick departure. We should not have looked more closely into the safe.

As it was, Raffles held in his hands the diplomatic pouch containing documents of perhaps crucial importance to the Raj. But we had acquired it by theft. It was a dangerous acquisition. What would Raffles do with it?

He straightened up, put the pouch and the lamp on the counter. From the tray of gemstones he picked out the unset rubies. There were 16 of them. He pocketed them. He did not touch the gems that were in settings, but he also pocketed the silver greyhound insignia. I sensed that he was thinking hard about the best way to deal with our strange and perilous situation. Suddenly he spoke. I hardly recognised his voice, for he spoke with the clipped accent unique to persons of Anglo-Indian birth and upbringing.

"So!" he said. "So, Dass, my friend"—he was talking to me—"we come to steal Kyff *sahib*'s rubies, but behold, we find also a bonus, yes? This pouch! For this pouch a reward is offered, Dass!"

Bound, gagged, blindfold, face down on the cushions of the divan, Rancil Kyff had ceased writhing, and I sensed that he was listening intently.

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"How comes Kyff *sahib* by this pouch," Raffles said to me, his tone singularly sly and exultant, "if he is not a staging-post for intelligence material gathered and passed northward by some spy network? No wonder Kyff *sahib* makes journeys often to China Coast! For curios?" Raffles cackled evilly. "Oah, no! Kyff *sahib* goes there to deliver intelligence harvest to Russian *sahibs*—oah, yes, that is sartain, Dass!

"So now, I tell you what we do, Dass. You take the rubies and hide them. We deny all knowledge of rubies. Me, I go now to police. I pretend that *always* I have deep suspicion of Kyff *sahib*. So, as loyal subject of the Raj, I break into Kyff *sahib* his shop to seek proof of suspicions. And I say to police *sahib*, 'behold, here is proof—this pouch!' And I claim the reward—our bonus, Dass—oah, yes!"

Raffles, as he was concluding his cunning discourse, had moved to the divan, where he seemed to be testing the knots of the scarf that bound Kyff's wrists.

"He is tight bound, Dass, quite helpless," Raffles said. "He will be safe here for hour or so—till police come for him. So come, my friend, we go now!"

We took off our scarf-masks, blew out the lamp, unbolted the street door, and left, closing the door behind us.

"Actually, Bunny," Raffles said, as we walked off along the silent street, "what I said about Kyff is obviously the truth. He's a traitor. You and I, of course, can't afford to involve ourselves in an official inquiry, so we've no option but to let Kyff escape. For that reason, I didn't tighten the scarf round his wrists, I loosened it. It shouldn't take him more than ten or fifteen minutes to free himself. But his cobra fangs are drawn. If he values his skin, he'll be on his way out of Simla—and out of India—well within the hour."

"But, Raffles," I said, my throat parched, "what about the diplomatic pouch?"

"Ah, that's important, Bunny," Raffles said. "I have it here under my dinner-coat. We must make the best possible use of this pouch, so valuable to the Raj. I'm giving the matter some careful thought."

By way of the rear balcony of Peliti's Hotel, we regained our rooms without anyone in the place knowing that we had left them.

I felt uneasy about what I now thought of, in my own mind, as

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the Shere Khan pouch. It was an incriminating article to have in our possession.

I determined to raise the matter at breakfast. I was late down. I found Raffles, immaculate in a white suit, a pearl in his cravat, already at table. Scarcely had the waiter brought me my coffee than a small pageboy, pert in white tunic and red turban, came to the table.

"O Raffles *sahib,*" he said, "an Officer awaits you in the lobby."

Oh, dear God! I thought. My heart sank.

"I'll be there in a moment," Raffles said, and as the pageboy left us, Raffles gave me a hard glance. "Keep your head, Bunny, whatever happens."

He took a sip of his coffee, lighted a cigarette. I sensed his tension. He rose. I felt it imperative to know the worst immediately, so I accompanied him out of the dining-room.

By the desk in the lobby stood a fine-looking man in a pith helmet, white jodhpurs, impeccable blue tunic. Holstered on his gleaming leather belt was a revolver. He gave us a glance, then immediately strode across to us with a jingle of his silver spurs.

"Raffles and Manders?" he said. "How nice to see you!" He smiled. "I'm Peter Pemberton, Bengal Lancers, *aide-de-camp* to the Viceroy. I've had a letter about you from my Rajput friend, Kumar Shri Ranjitsinjhi. He tells me you've been staying with him in Nawanagar, and he asks me to see to it that you enjoy your visit to Simla." He half turned from us, called, "Oh, Ella—"

I felt as though the lobby were revolving around me, for an extremely pretty girl wearing a summery dress and an attractive little hat, and carrying a parasol, was coming towards us.

"Ella," said Lieutenant Pemberton, "may I present Ranji's friends? Mr. Raffles, Mr. Manders—Miss Ellaline Cambray."

"Dear me," said Raffles, "this *is* a surprise! Won't you join us at coffee?"

"Unfortunately we can't stop now, my dear fellow," said Lieutenant Pemberton. "The Viceroy's commanded me to take Miss Cambray to Viceregal Lodge for coffee this morning. The Vicereine wants to meet her. What we've dropped in here for is to tell you that Miss Cambray's parents are giving a dinner-party this evening. We've arranged with them for you fellows to come, and we simply won't take no for an answer, will we, Ella?"

"Absolutely not," said Ellaline Cambray, with a charming smile. "*Do* please come!"

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"Manders and I look forward to it keenly," Raffles assured her.

"Splendid," said Pemberton. "Eight o'clock, then, at the Cambrays' place—Sobraon House, just off the Ladies' Mile."

"Well, well," said Raffles, as the attractive young couple left us, "Simla's a small place, Bunny!" He lowered his voice. "This invitation could be useful. There's something I want to find out about that mail-pouch, and I may get a chance to-night."

To my surprise and growing uneasiness, among the guests at Sobraon House that evening was Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. She wore a *sari* of dark blue silk. I had dipped into her famous book, *Isis Unveiled,* which—like herself—disturbed and fascinated me. Seated next to her, at dinner, was the young Lahore journalist with the mature eyebrows and moustache and the thick-lensed glasses. With the diplomatic pouch and the stolen rubies weighing on my mind, I wondered uncomfortably what the journalist and Madame Blavatsky were talking about.

With the *gateaux*, at the conclusion of dinner, champagne was served. At the head of the table, our host, Major Lionel Cambray, ruddily handsome in his scarlet mess-jacket, rose to his feet. Swaying slightly, he announced the engagement of his daughter Ellaline to Lieutenant Peter Pemberton, Bengal Lancers.

The announcement was received with general rapture. Toasts were drunk to the happy couple, after which the ladies withdrew to discuss the romance, leaving us men to discuss, over port and cigars so creditable that it was no wonder Major Cambray was insolvent, the more important subjects of pigsticking, polo, and tiger-shooting.

"Talking of tigers," said the journalist from Lahore, puffing meditatively at his pipe, "I mentioned the Shere Khan mystery to Madame Blavatsky. She tells me the Viceroy hasn't consulted her on the subject. Don't you think, Pemberton, that might be rather a pity?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed white-whiskered, blue-uniformed Colonel Jebb, Director of Army Medical Services, Punjab Area. "The Viceroy, pro-consul of the Crown, consult a mystic of the White Lotus on a State problem of the Raj? Bah, the day that happens the British'll be finished in India! Eh, Pemberton? Tell this ink-slinger feller. You're *aide-de-camp* to the Viceroy."

"Curiously enough, Colonel," said Peter Pemberton, "there's been a development in the matter of the diplomatic mail-pouch. There's no reason why you shouldn't all know about it."

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I stared fixedly at my wine. I dared not look at Raffles.

"This morning, very early," said Pemberton, "a rickshaw coolie presented himself at the police station. He's a scrawny old chap, getting a bit frail for running around pulling a rickshaw. Anyway, it seems he slept last night, curled up in his rickshaw, under a tree on the Ladies' Mile. He woke when the bugles at the cantonments were sounding reveille. As he stretched his old joints, he felt something with his bare feet. He looked down and, by God, there it was—the missing mail-pouch!"

Blood rushed into my head. So Raffles had gone out again after we had parted last night!

"The old coolie," said Peter Pemberton, "ran straight to the police station with it. Of course, he'll get the reward, and I'm told he intends to buy a few hectares of land at his home village, down near Ambala. He's set up for life."

So Raffles, after careful thought, had indeed made the best possible use of the Raj's mail-pouch! I met his grey eyes across the table. There was a dancing vivacity in them.

After some fruitless speculation as to what might lie behind the reappearance of the mail-pouch, we all joined the ladies in the drawing-room. We found them discussing Mrs. Cambray's pearl necklace.

"Actually, in view of its effect on me," Dorothy Cambray was saying, as she wielded her fan, "and as Ella has a distaste for it, I'd decided to accept an offer which that man Rancil Kyff had made me for the necklace. But when I went to see him about it to-day, he wasn't at his shop. His *dhobi wallah,* who also does his cleaning and dusting for him, was there. He told me he'd found Mr. Kyff absent and the shop left unlocked this morning. I waited for a while, but Mr. Kyff didn't appear, so I left."

Two turbaned servants entered, bearing trays.

"Now, who," said Mrs. Cambray, our gracious hostess, "would like coffee, and who would prefer tea?"

"Talking of tea, Mrs. Cambray," said the young journalist from Lahore, "I wonder if it's occurred to you—apropos of your necklace problem, which I've heard much spoken about—to consult Madame Blavatsky?"

I felt my palms moisten as all eyes turned curiously to the small, grey-haired, calm lady in the dark blue *sari.*

"I am interested, Mrs. Cambray," she said, "in what you have told me about your necklace. I would like to see it."

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"Certainly," said Dorothy Cambray, and she turned to her husband. "Lionel, would you mind running upstairs and getting my necklace for Madame Blavatsky? You know where I keep it, don't you?"

"I think so," muttered Major Cambray, and he left the room with a very strange look on his face.

I glanced at the young journalist whose literary instinct, coupled with a curiosity about Madame Blavatsky's powers of divination, had provoked this turn of events. He took off his glasses to polish them, his blue eyes bright with interest.

As Mrs. Cambray poured tea, while Ella poured coffee, I sensed a growing tension in the air. Major Cambray returned. With a haggard look, he handed the necklace-case to his wife, who took from it the rope of pearls and passed it to Madame Blavatsky.

The young man from Lahore hooked his glasses back on. Over the party, all with cups in their hands—the ladies seated, the gentlemen standing—a tense stillness had come. My heart thumped. With sensitive fingers, the small, grey-haired lady in the blue *sari* fondled the pearls, not looking at them, her strange, light, wide-set eyes unseeing, introspective.

There was not a sound in the room. Thinly, from out in the night, came the call of a bugle: "Lights Out, Lights Out"—and I seemed to see, far to the north, the high snows of the Himalayas, looming eternal against the stars.

"There is, there has been," Madame Blavatsky said, her voice a murmur, as in a trance, "something—something wrong—some shadow—some threat of lost faith and great unhappiness—upon these pearls. And yet—and yet—"

Perception of her whereabouts seemed to return to her eyes. She frowned, as though perplexed.

"Mrs. Cambray," she said, "if you are drinking tea, finish it, make three circles in the air with your cup, then turn it, downward, on the saucer."

Dorothy Cambray obeyed. So still was the room that a moth was audible, beating frail wings against a fringed lampshade.

"You understand," Madame Blavatsky said, "that Good and Evil, which constitute the *mysterium magnum,* can sometimes—not always—be perceived in the pattern which the tea leaves take in the cup."

The cup stood, downturned, on the saucer. Madame Blavatsky took up the cup and studied its residue of broken leaves. Nobody

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moved. At last she drew in her breath, deeply. She replaced the cup on the saucer, then held out the pearl necklace to Mrs. Cambray.

"Put on your pearls," said Madame Blavatsky. "There is no harm in them."

"Now, by heaven!" Colonel Jebb exploded. "Bravo, Madame Blavatsky! That's exactly what I told her. I said, 'It's all in the *mind,* Mrs. Cambray!' "

But Dorothy Cambray hesitated to take the pearls.

"Dorothy," said a lady with a patrician nose, whom I understood to be the wife of the Judge-Advocate-General, "*I* have implicit faith in Madame Blavatsky. See?" She took the rope of pearls and looped it several times around her neck. "I've always admired these pearls. If you still wish to sell them, I'll improve on any offer made to you by Rancil Kyff."

"Dorothy," objected a lady with lorgnettes, "why should Lady Royelme have your pearls? I, too, have absolute faith in Madame Blavatsky, and I'm sure I can make you quite as good an offer as Maude Royelme."

Other ladies now began to put in claims to be given first offer of the pearls which previously had been repugnant to them, and Madame Blavatsky, perhaps disheartened by the mundane proceedings now so obviously developing, stood up to take her leave.

"I feel a little tired, Mrs. Cambray," she said.

"Madame Blavatsky," said the young man from Lahore, "may I have the honour of escorting you to your hotel?"

His petition being granted, they went away together. Their departure hardly was noticed by the Cambrays, for the bidding was growing keener. Dorothy Cambray looked totally bemused, but the ineffable Major Lionel Cambray was visibly recovering his dash and confidence at the prospect of a restored solvency.

"He doesn't deserve his luck, Bunny," said Raffles wryly, as we left Sobraon House while the bidding was still going on. "On the other hand, that old rickshaw-runner has well earned a spot of manna. Life cuts both ways."

With the 16 stolen rubies concealed in a hollow bat which Raffles always kept handy with the more conventional ones in his cricket-bag, he thought it impolitic for us to stay longer in Simla. So, next morning, we took a last stroll along the Ladies' Mile.

"By the way, Raffles," I said, musing on the events of our visit, "I don't recall any mention of that young journalist's name."

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"Neither do I, Bunny," said Raffles. "But he did mention that he and a colleague of his signed their better efforts in the *Civil and Military Gazette* with their initials, so I glanced through his discarded copy of that paper. I found several verses and short tales—some signed with the initials K.R., others with those initials reversed. We must ask our journalist friend his name, if we see him again."

As it happened, we saw him a few minutes later, near Viceregal Lodge, where in the sunshine the standard of the Raj fluttered in light airs coming from the distant, snowcapped Himalayas. He was unmistakable, with his moustache and his thick-lensed glasses, as he stood smoking his pipe and listening to the lively talk of a barefoot, turbaned boy wearing a tattered Army shirt girdled with rope.

A teak bowl in his hand, the boy was standing at the side of an ancient, wrinkled man who, in a faded yellow robe, was seated on the ground, his back to the trunk of a magnolia tree. His sandals beside him, his thin legs folded in the lotus position, he seemed to be muttering to himself as he fondled with gnarled hands some sort of wooden article.

"Pilgrims, Bunny," Raffles murmured to me. "An old Tibetan lama with his prayer-wheel, and his disciple with their rice bowl. Our friend hasn't seen us. He may be gathering story material. We'd better not intrude on him just now."

So, as things turned out, we never did learn our journalist friend's name, although, irrelevantly enough, we did hear that of the lama's disciple.

For, as we strolled on past them, we heard the young man from Lahore, puffing meditatively at his pipe, say to the boy with the rice bowl, "And what, may I ask, is *your* name?"

"I am called, *sahib*," the boy replied, "Kim."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Mr. Manders' narrative, one of a number of his clandestine records belatedly discovered in undisclosed circumstances, appears to recount an adventure that occurred very early in his association with A. J. Raffles.

Recent research reveals, in corroboration of the events described by Mr. Manders, that on the staff of

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the Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette* at that time, there were indeed two rising young journalists whose initials were the same, though reversed.

In consequence, the work of K.R., a Mr. Kay Robinson, was occasionally confused with that of his colleague, R.K., who later rose to such literary eminence as to achieve bibliographers, so that early misattributions were duly corrected.

From evidence implicit in Mr. Manders' narrative, there seems small room for doubt as to which of the two young journalists is the one to whom he refers. The moustached young man wearing thick-lensed eyeglasses was Rudyard Kipling.

CRIMINALIMERICK

LOYAL TO THE END

by D. R. BENSEN

Hard pursued, Raffles fled up the street,
Found a dustbin a handy retreat;
But a band he'd not seen
Struck up "God Save the Queen,"
And he solemnly rose to his feet.

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a *NEW* rollicker by

RON GOULART

The offbeat tale of an ad man who handled the Snarl Dog Food account, and of an artist (really, an animator) who did great dogs, and of a TV program producer who was wildly jealous, in the kind of far-out story you would expect from Ron Goulart . . . you might even call it a shaggy bear story . . .

PLEASE DON'T HELP THE BEAR

by *RON GOULART*

They couldn't imagine why he died with that particular look on his face.

Not that they wasted much time on the case—it was so open-and-shut. There was the victim with three slugs in him, and there was the murderer still wandering around and waving the gun when the police his wife had called arrived. And they figured they knew what the motive was.

The fact he'd been killed in that room and not one of the others didn't mean anything to them.

Leah Wentz knew what it meant, but she claimed to be in shock and never did get around to telling anybody about it.

I'm probably the only other person who knows exactly what happened that night at the Wentz Dynavision Cartoon Studios. Even Wentz didn't know.

I met Chuck Dancer about a year and a half ago in the big sunny offices of Dr. Warloff over in Santa Monica. Warloff is the best allergy man in Southern California and I'd developed a very embarrassing allergy. I was the senior account man on the Snarl Dog Food account. Every time lately I opened a can of the stuff my hands got all tingly and I started breaking out in red blotches.

Since I was trying to convince the client that our "so meaty it bounces" campaign was the one to go with, I had to open a lot of

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cans of Snarl. Open them and bounce the stuff on the conference table for the junior account men and on the drawing boards of the Food Art Department. So I was tingling and splotching all the time and the client, or at least old Henshew, was eyeing me in that odd way which means your loyalty is in doubt.

There I was then on that bright August afternoon, sitting in Warloff's waiting room with a copy of *Doctor Vacation News* open to an article on Swiss spas. Actually I was watching the long stripe of blue Pacific out the windows.

Chuck came in, sat down next to me, and started sneezing. "Excuse me," he said, sniffling. "Did I sneeze on your mag?"

"No, that's okay." I closed the magazine.

Chuck sneezed three more times, loud body-shaking sneezes. "You don't have a dog, do you?" he asked.

"Yes, I do. I have to."

He was a long lean man, about 30, and casually dressed. He sniffed, his Adam's apple bobbing, and said, "I've heard of people being told they *couldn't* keep dogs, but never that they *had* to have one."

"I'm in the ad game," I explained. "I handle the Snarl Dog Food account and they expect me to have a dog of my own. Actually I don't care much for dogs, especially this one. He's always attacking squirrels and burying my shoes and—"

"I love animals," Chuck told me. "I love to draw them. But when I get within ten feet of one—whammo!"

"You an artist?"

"Animator. I was with Wentz Dynavision when I first got out here, now I'm with Sensational-McClosky. Hey, you ought to take a look at our sample reel. I do great dogs."

I'd been hearing good things about Sensational-McClosky. And they were supposed to be a lot cheaper than the big studios like Wentz. I think they'd recently won the Calcutta Art Directors Award for a 20-second toilet-bowl cleaner spot—you've probably seen it, the commercial where the toilet seat dances. So I invited Chuck to bring their reel in and screen it for me and our Food Art people.

I had lunch with Chuck about four weeks after that. He'd showed the S-M stuff to our agency and we'd hired his outfit to do three 30-second Fake Milk spots—the ones with the dancing cows, if you remember.

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The first thing he did after sitting down opposite me in the booth at the Mexican Quickie Restaurant was to sneeze—six times, shaking the formica table and rattling the napkin holder. "Remember Elsie St. Clair?"

I've lived over 20 years in Southern California, but I'm not much on movie nostalgia. "The nineteen-thirties' movie star?"

"That Elsie St. Clair, yeah. Just saw her out in the parking lot and she's a very stunning woman." He sneezed loudly twice more.

"You allergic to old actresses?"

"No, to her leopard. She goes around with one on a leash. Animal hair, any kind of animal hair." He grabbed a fistful of paper napkins and wiped his nose. "Hey, listen. Good and bad things are happening to me."

"You haven't checked your allergies?"

"No, Dr. Warloff says I'm severely allergic to all types of animal hair. I can't even go near a fur coat without sneezing. It's going to be a long slow process to desensitize me." He wiped his nose again. "While sitting around there a week or so back I met the most incredible girl, another patient of his. She's a redhead, a real authentic redhead. Freckles, the coppery hair, the beautiful skin that some redhaired women have, and fantastic green eyes. She's not exactly zoftig, but I prefer the willowy type. I'd love to get her coloring into a cartoon. The exact shade of red contrasted with the green of—"

"What's the bad part?"

"Wouldn't be necessarily bad, these days," said Chuck, swallowing. "You know, new morality, open marriage."

"She's married?"

"Yeah, and it's incredible who she's married to. She's Wentz's new wife. Married him last year. Her name used to be Leah Taplin. Did you ever see her in the movies?"

"No. Was she in the movies?"

"Well, she made two films. *Cry of the Blood Bathers* and *Diary of a Loathsome Fiend*. You didn't see either one, huh?"

I shook my head. "You're in love with her?"

"Oh, sure, there's no doubt about that."

"How's she feel, how does Leah Wentz feel?"

"Wentz has got to be fifty, and she's only twenty-four. Boy, the things people get themselves into." He crumpled, one by one, the napkins into tight balls. "Yeah, she likes me. We've had dinner twice and—yeah, she likes me. Trouble is, Wentz is one of these

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wildly jealous types. Wants to know where everybody is every minute, practically asks her to phone in every hour when she's not with him."

"Where's she tell him she is when she's with you?"

"If it's Tuesday she says she's at Willie Nolan's acting lab. Remember him in the movies back in the Forties?"

"No. And if it's not Tuesday?"

"Thursdays she's supposed to go to a lecture on Existential Meditation at that temple out by Malibu." He crumpled a few more napkins. "Mostly so far I've been seeing her on Tuesdays and Thursdays." He put his sharp elbows on the table and leaned toward me. "You ever commit adultery?"

I looked away from him. "Well, in the advertising business—"

"No, I mean love, not business."

"Oh, in that case, no."

"It's pretty terrible," Chuck said. Then he laughed. "But it's great too."

I was in the East for the rest of September and almost half of October. Dr. Warloff's treatments had eliminated the splotches, but now every time I opened a can of Snarl I coughed. The agency decided I'd better switch to another account for a while.

I spent a few weeks touring the Schweitzer Brothers brewery in the Bronx and meeting the three brothers and their assorted sons and nephews. Back in 1949 they'd paid out $10,000 to have six man-size beer bottles made—the kind girls put on and danced in. It took me a week of long heated meetings to convince them the only way to show dancing beer bottles nowadays was with animation.

I came back home with the idea of calling Chuck and giving Sensational-McClosky a chance to work on some beer storyboards for us. My wife told me Chuck had been calling our house three or four times a day for the past week, anxious to know when I was going to return.

On the phone he wouldn't tell me why he was so agitated. When I got to the Scow bar out in Malibu he was already in a booth with a bottle of beer in front of him. I noticed it wasn't Schweitzer's. "What's wrong? If it's Leah maybe you ought to—"

"You know what Wentz is going to do?" Chuck asked.

"You mean he's found out?"

"No, no, he's so busy moving into his big new studio in the val-

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ley and getting his new series ready for TV he's got no time to be insanely jealous." Chuck, his Adam's apple fluttering, turned suddenly to stare across the smoky room. "That guy looks damn familiar. I've seen him someplace lately."

The man was squat, balding, and sitting at the bar alone and apparently staring up at the starfish and seashells tangled in the netting over the liquor shelves. "An old actor?"

"Don't think so. Well, that's not what I want to talk about." He moved his bottle an inch forward. "Did I ever tell you about Bubber Bear?"

I said he hadn't and Chuck went on to tell me. When he'd worked for Wentz some four years ago, he'd invented a character named Bubber Bruin. The animated bear was supposed to be a sort of underground, anti-establishment type, real shaggy. He was continually plaguing a more conventional suburban raccoon. The theme song of the show was an old folk tune called "The Preacher and the Bear."

The preacher gets treed by a wild bear while in the woods and he climbs up a tree and asks the Lord for help. He concludes the prayer with a line something like, "And, Lord, if you can't help me, please don't help the bear." In Chuck's show the raccoon was continually quoting that last line.

Wentz had liked Chuck's idea well enough to let him do several storyboards for a half-hour show and he'd finally allowed him to do a five-minute animated segment. Then Wentz had decided Bubber Bruin was too controversial for the Saturday-morning kid slots.

"Now, four years later, he's sold the damn thing to TV," Chuck concluded. "Leah told me all about it—it hasn't been in the trades yet. She didn't even know I had anything to do with Bubber. Hell, my own character!"

"If you did it while you were working for Wentz, it's his," I told Chuck. "Legally, no matter how much you feel you've been bilked, it's Wentz's character now."

"I'm not talking legal, I'm talking moral," he said. "Wentz promised me a piece of the show. If it got going I was to get ten percent of the take. Ten percent."

"Did Wentz put that in writing?"

"No, of course he didn't."

"Only other thing you can do is talk to him."

"I've been trying to phone him for a week. He's never in, they

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tell me. He never returns my calls."

"Maybe you need an attorney. A friend of mine—"

"I don't need a lawyer," Chuck said. "You forget, I've got Leah on my side."

I had to fly back to New York again a few days after that. One of the younger Schweitzers insisted we take a look at a piece of film he'd made with his girl friend as a dancing beer bottle. I don't know what the girl looked like out of the bottle, but her legs didn't match. One was fatter than the other. I had to have five separate meetings with all the Schweitzers before any of them would admit that, yes, the left leg was a little chunkier.

While I was still in New York I noticed an item in *Variety* about Wentz opening his new studio out in the San Fernando Valley. Three separate buildings covering ten acres. The main building had 65 rooms, including a fully equipped movie theater, a museum housing a thousand of the best animated cartoons of all time, and even a room to keep Wentz's collection of stuffed animals. Wentz, or one of his PR people, claimed he actually got cartoon ideas by sketching from his many examples of the taxidermist's art. The story concluded with the news that Wentz had signed his biggest contract yet with TV for a new show entitled *Bubber Bruin and Company*.

Back in L.A. I couldn't get hold of Chuck for almost a week. He wasn't at the Sensational-McClosky studio, he wasn't at his cottage up on Scenario Lane, and his answering service implied that he'd vanished from the face of the earth without a word to them.

Two more days passed before, at just about midnight, Chuck called me. "I wanted to say goodbye," he said.

"You going somewhere?" I was hunched on my side of the bed, trying not to wake my wife.

"I'm phoning from a booth out in the valley, so I guess it's safe to talk."

"Talk about what? You in some kind of trouble?"

"No, I'm fine. Leah and I are going to Mexico in about three hours. As soon as we pay a visit to the studio."

"You're going to Wentz's studio?"

"Leah has keys, and she knows the combination of the safe in Wentz's private office."

"The safe? Chuck, what the hell are you—"

"Tell them to call you in the morning," murmured my wife.

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"It's not the agency."

Chuck said, "Huh?"

In a lower, but more intense, voice, I told him, "You can't take anything from Wentz's safe, Chuck."

"Going to take what Wentz owes me. Leah thinks there's about $100,000 in there," he explained. "That's maybe not—"

"Time. Signal when you're finished," cut in the operator.

"Yeah, sure. $100,000 isnt enough really, but we know a place in Mexico where—"

"The last time I talked to you you were going to get a lawyer and talk this over with Wentz."

"Nope, that was your idea. As far as talking to him goes—well, he knows about me and Leah. He's had detectives on her trail for weeks. Remember the guy at the Scow bar I thought looked so familiar? One of Wentz's boys."

"You can't rob the man of $100,000!"

"See *Daily Variety* yesterday? See what the network is paying him for twenty-six Bubber shows? Anyway, Leah's his wife, so—"

"That doesn't mean you can—"

"I'll drop you a letter when we get settled. Won't use my real name, but I trust you not to tell Wentz where we are."

"Obviously I'm not going to do that, Chuck. But you can't—"

" 'Bye." And he hung up.

What happened next I'm guessing about, at least part of it. I've talked to one of the cops involved and I'm quite certain things went about as I've imagined.

Chuck, at exactly the agreed-on time of 12:30, climbed over the back wall of the studio grounds. Wentz didn't have a watchman. Hurrying, panting from the exertion, Chuck made his way to a side door of the main building. He tapped three times and Leah opened the door.

She looked incredibly pretty standing there in the corridor, her long auburn hair tied back with an emerald-green ribbon, her green eyes bright with excitement. She kissed him once, her lips warm, and led him down the gray-carpeted hall. "His office is right along here," she said, her hand tightening on Chuck's.

The office was enormous, even for a Hollywood studio, and it seemed to take them a long time to get across it. The safe was behind an oil painting—an oil painting of Bubber Bruin.

"Oh, that's perfect," remarked Chuck. "Just perfect."

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Leah reached up and swung the painting away. The sound of brakes squealing came from outside.

A few seconds later they heard a voice bellowing in the night. "You cheap bimbo! I'm going to kill him right in front of your two-timing eyes!"

Leah pushed the painting back in place. "He won't do anything if he can't find you."

"He sounds mad enough to keep looking."

"No, he'll get over it in a while. I know him. I can persuade him to calm down, but you've got to keep out of his sight."

He touched her cheek, spun, and ran out a door of the office.

He could hear Wentz stomping into the other end of the building. "One bullet in the knee! One in the stomach! One through the heart! Nobody swipes a wife from Wentz!"

Obviously the private detectives, despite all of Chuck's lying low, were still up on what he and Leah were doing.

Chuck, his throat dry, went two-stepping up a pipe and plastic stairway to the second floor of the studio building. All was dark up there, so he had to go more slowly.

He felt his way to the end of the dark corridor, found a door, and tried it. The door opened and he stepped into the black room beyond. Chuck sensed several large shapes in the darkness. He ducked behind one, crouched, and listened.

It was a big studio. Sixty-five rooms, wasn't that what the stories said? Yeah, 65, and Wentz would probably never have the patience to search them all. If Chuck kept silent and stayed hunched down behind this big black object his chances weren't bad. Better than breaking from the building and maybe running into one of Wentz's private detectives. Leah probably would be able to calm Wentz down and get him headed for home.

Chuck listened hard. Was that Wentz coming up the stairs?

His eyes were getting used to the darkness. He was able to see things in the faint moonlight coming in through the tightly blinded windows. It was then Chuck realized where he was.

Rising all around him, in life-like poses, was the famous Wentz collection of stuffed animals. Raccoons, pumas, cats, dogs, a leopard, a lion, and, the big object he was trying to hide behind, a grizzly bear. Stuffed animals, every one rich with animal hair.

Chuck clenched his fists, gritted his teeth, fought against the impulse which was tearing at him and growing stronger.

The impulse to sneeze. And sneeze. And sneeze . . .

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a *NEW* short story by

CELIA FREMLIN

Julian Symons, the eminent detective-story writer and historian of the mystery-crime story, was familiar with the work of Celia Fremlin before your Editor had read any of her stories, and it was Mr. Symons who suggested that we ask Celia Fremlin to write for EQMM. It was an inspired recommendation, and we shall always be grateful to Julian, and to Celia Fremlin for acceding to our request. She is a bright star in the EQMM galaxy. . .

Her newest story is like a sword cane—a concealed weapon with a deadly point at its end. . .

ETIQUETTE FOR DYING

by CELIA FREMLIN

At what point, exactly, did the embarrassment—the sheer, cringing embarrassment of the thing—change over into fear? And then from fear into outright terror, and the recognition of approaching tragedy?

Twisting the bedside lamp to a sharper angle, Agnes leaned closer, watching the uneasy twitching of her husband's eyelids over his closed eyes. In the dim greenish light the lines were sharply etched in the face sunk against the pillows, and he looked suddenly, terrifyingly old. But of course illness—serious illness—can do that to a person, even within a few hours.

How many hours? Glancing at Lady Olivia's bedside clock—for it was to their hostess' bedroom that Bert had been carried, amid a muted turmoil of well-bred dismay, after his collapse at the dinner table just as the salmon paupiettes were being served—glancing at the clock, Agnes noted, with a sort of slow incredulity, that it was still only a little after nine. Less than an hour had passed since Bert, glass of whiskey still in his hand, had brought

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to a standstill in mid-sentence the amusing anecdote he had been relating to his neighbor, the local M.P.'s wife, and had quietly slewed sideways in his chair and come crashing to the floor, dragging with him a great swath of shining linen tablecloth. With a dreadful clattering of Georgian china and priceless glass, he had subsided into a crumpled heap on the carpet, limbs twitching.

How *could* he! This (to her subsequent shame) had been Agnes' first and totally spontaneous reaction to the catastrophe. How *could* he!—and in front of all these important people too! Lady Olivia's antique dinner service, her precious glass! Fury—a whole raging, bottled-up decade of it—boiled up in Agnes during those microseconds of scandalized silence before the clamor began: the blinding, impotent fury of a wife whose husband has disgraced her, has once again, and in the most public and unforgivable way possible, humiliated her—humiliated himself—in front of their friends.

No, not even friends. Friends, perhaps, could forgive these things, even within a week or two laugh at them. "Do you remember that awful night when old Bert. . .?"—but Lady Olivia and her entourage were *not* friends, not in this sense. They were too important to be friends, and too rich. All those smoothly successful men, those straight-backed women a-glitter with diamonds—they weren't *friends*, but people whose favor must be sought, whose approval must be gained: tycoons, diplomats, television personalities. The catastrophe *could* not have been more awful.

Because, of course, they would all have assumed that Bert was drunk. Agnes herself assumed it. All those whiskies before dinner, and then those soft-footed waiters padding round the table, filling his glass again, and yet again, even before the hors d'oeuvres were finished, knowing her husband's weakness, especially under stress.

Agnes had been watching every sip he took, counting every glass, ever since they'd arrived at the house. Even before they filed into the great dining room, her nerves were already at snapping point on his account; and when at last the crash came, the ghastly glittering slither of silver and precious glass, she had found herself praying, before she could stop herself, Please God, let him be dead! Please God, let him not be merely drunk! To *die* at an elegant dinner table—that is socially forgivable; but drunkenness, never.

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He wasn't dead, of course; but nevertheless, everyone behaved beautifully, as of course they would in that kind of household. Without even a flicker of a glance toward her ruined dinner service or her smashed crystal goblets, Lady Olivia had calmed her guests, had had the victim carried solicitously and instantly upstairs to her own bedroom, and herself had telephoned the doctor.

"Suddenly taken ill," was the phrase she used, in tones of ringing concern, clearly audible through the great dining-room door; and neither by word nor by intonation had she given the faintest indication of being aware that the patient had simply passed out.

Such is breeding. Slinking shamefacedly upstairs behind her disgraced and unconscious husband, Agnes could not but be vaguely grateful for it. Though she could scarcely breathe for shame at the thought of what Lady Olivia must really be thinking, it was a relief that Lady Olivia could be counted on not to say it.

Brandy? Dinner sent up on a tray? Even a cup of tea? Agnes shook her head, still speechless with shame; and presently Lady Olivia, her duty by the two disgraced guests correctly, even graciously, performed, swept elegantly from the room.

What poise! What savoir faire! Crouched guiltily by her husband's bedside, Agnes could not help feeling a stab of unwilling admiration. By now the mess would have been unobtrusively cleared up, and the dinner party would be in full swing again, with Lady Olivia effortlessly setting her guests at ease, passing it all off as if this sort of thing happened every day.

Well, that's aristocracy for you, Agnes reflected wryly. Bred into the bones it was, over hundreds of years, this unflappable presence of mind, this imperturbable façade in the teeth of absolutely anything. Poor Bert, with all his passionate social climbing, he would never make it, never. It took a thousand years; and Bert, at 43, had been at the job for barely ten.

And anyway, just look at him! Couldn't even hold his liquor, let alone display these other, more regal, forms of self-command!

And it was now, looking down at her husband's still face in the green-shaded lamplight, that Agnes became conscious of her first qualm of fear.

Because this didn't look like drunkenness—not the kind of drunkenness she had grown used to over the years. Where were the hiccups, where was the heavy, sterterous breathing, the throwing-up over someone else's carpet? The awful insufferable humiliations rose up out of the past—and suddenly they seemed

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like mere pinpricks in the context of this new and unfamiliar dread. She would have given anything now to see a return of the familiar, disgusting symptoms; how willingly would she have rushed at this very moment, in all the old familiar panic, for towel and basin to save Lady Olivia's heirloom bedspread!

But there was no need. Not this time. Already he had gone beyond this sort of thing. In the greenish light she looked again at her husband's face, and it appeared waxen, and very still. Even the twitching of the eyelids had ceased, and he lay as if dead, only the faint jerky rise and fall of the sheets showing that he was still breathing. Breathing too rapidly, too unevenly, as if his lungs and heart were already faltering in their rhythm.

She wished desperately that the doctor would come. Dare she make a fuss about it—ring the bell at the bedhead—bother someone? Was it *done* to ring for your hostess' servants, even if someone was dying?

Turning the lamp away from Bert's face, she leaned over and tried once again to rouse him.

"Bert!" she said, quite loudly, "Bert, wake up! It's all right, everything's going to be all right, Lady Olivia isn't angry, she—"

But it was no good. She shook him, spoke loudly into his ear; but there was no drunken, inconsequential mumbling in response, no clumsy groping of half-conscious hands. The hand she held in hers was limp and cool, it reminded her of lilies. White lilies, and the proximity of death.

Death! How could such a thing be possible? Bert *dying*? Greedy, self-indulgent, go-getting *Bert*? Impossible! Death just wasn't his thing!

When *would* the doctor arrive? An hour now since he'd been summoned—surely he'd have realized that it was an emergency? A man of 43 collapsing suddenly—why it might be *anything*!

Heart attack? Stroke? Raking through her sparse medical knowledge, Agnes tried to recall those last minutes before the catastrophe. Had Bert looked odd in any way? Ill? Had he been behaving strangely? Certainly, in the drawing room before dinner, he had looked nervous and agitated.

From her observation point at the far end of the room, Agnes had watched him arguing heatedly with a slim supercilious young man—a television star, as she learned later—and losing the argument. Not that she'd been able to hear from that distance what either of them was saying, but she could tell by the insolent set of

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Bert's shoulders, by the arrogant gesture with which he thrust his empty glass at a passing waiter, that he had been worsted.

But not ill, no. Just at a disadvantage, and out of his depth in this company, and too proud, as always, to admit it to himself.

And at dinner?—the abortive beginnings of dinner, that is, which were all that either he or she was destined to enjoy. From across the huge mahogany table she had watched him, with wifely anxiety, launching into conversation with Mrs. Beltravers, wife of the Conservative M.P., watched him boasting, as usual, describing how he'd used his influence to quash the Council's plans for a Remand Home just next to the Arts Centre—was he *sure*, Agnes remembered wondering, that this had been a Labour project and not a Conservative one? Not that it mattered—you could see from Mrs. Beltravers' glazed expression that the affairs of her husband's constituency bored her into the ground.

And at least Bert was eating, Agnes remembered noting. *That'll* settle all those whiskies, she had reflected with satisfaction, watching him polishing off a plate piled high with assorted hors d'oeuvres. Duck pâté, jellied oysters, prawn darioles—wasn't it rather a faux pas, Agnes remembered wondering uneasily, to be eating the lot like this, as if he'd been starving for a week?

But now, sitting at his bedside in a growing turmoil of anxiety, Agnes had few thoughts to spare for the etiquette of the thing; ideas far more sinister were beginning to take possession of her.

Duck pâté! You could get food poisoning from duck pâté. And from shellfish too. She'd heard of people collapsing like that, suddenly, from food poisoning, though of course it was more usual for the symptoms to appear after an hour or so. On the other hand, if it was food poisoning, you'd expect the other guests to be affected too. The chance that Bert alone—

Chance? It was only now that Agnes became clearly conscious of the direction in which her uneasy thoughts were leading. She felt herself gripped by a violent trembling; sweat broke out on her forehead and on the palms of her hands; her stomach seemed to be tying itself in knots within her.

Murder! Deliberately administered poison! Poisoned pâté—or poisoned oysters? Poisoned *anything*, in fact, from that lavish table, groaning with exotic and unfamiliar foods. And Bert—poor gullible Bert, who for all his social pretensions knew no better than she did how these weird things *ought* to taste—poor Bert (and she could sympathize with this) would have swallowed *any-*

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thing, no matter how bitter or unpalatable, rather than show his unfamiliarity with such delicacies.

And if someone, knowing him well, aware of his hidden social ineptitude, and of his pride, and choosing to take advantage of this knowledge— But *who*? Who, of all this glittering throng, could be Bert's enemy?

Most of them—that was the answer. A man like Bert, pushing his way ruthlessly to the top, thrusting aside everything and everyone that stands in his way—such a man is going to make enemies. Somewhere along the way, had he pushed too hard?—trampled too blindly over feelings whose intensity he was unaware of? Stirred up against himself a hornet's nest of revenge and hate? Was this then, in the end, what Bert had earned for himself by all his struggles, all his social climbing, all his single-minded self-aggrandizement? Murder, death by poisoning?

The sheer horror of the thing seemed to take Agnes' breath away; her head swam; her heart pounded in her ears. The effrontery of it too! The dreadful, cold-blooded simplicity of the method! A little pharmaceutical knowledge, a little insight into Bert's vainglory and his precarious self-conceit, and the thing was in the bag. A verdict of accidental food poisoning would be a near-certainty.

Especially, of course, if *two* of the guests were known to have come down with it, one being lucky enough to have survived. As Agnes, the blood pounding in her brain, slumped sideways in her chair and slipped unconscious to the floor, Bert slid swiftly from under the blankets and hurried to her side.

The carefully chosen green light already made her features look close to death, just as his had looked; but this time the illusion was fast becoming reality. For some minutes—maybe half an hour—he sat with his finger on her failing pulse, his ears intent on the harsh, uneven rattle of her breath. When both had finally ceased, he got to his feet and hurried quietly along the corridor to the head of the great curving staircase.

Peering, half hidden by shadows, over the oak bannisters, he was able to watch Lady Olivia ushering her guests from the dining room into the great hall; and when she managed, unnoticed by anyone, to flash a swift glance up in his direction, he gave her the thumbs-up sign.

It had all gone off like a dream.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Join Dr. Sam Hawthorne, the retired New England general practitioner, and listen to another of his ratiocinative reminiscences—this time the "damnedest locked-room mystery" the old doctor "ever did see." It happened on Christmas Day in 1925, and the "locked room" was the belfry of a church steeple. Actually, it seemed a simple, open-and-shut case except for one thing—only one person could have committed the murder, and Dr. Hawthorne didn't believe that person was guilty. . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE CHRISTMAS STEEPLE

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

"Like I was sayin' last time," Dr. Sam Hawthorne began, getting down the brandy from the top shelf, "the year 1925 was a bad one for murder and other violent crimes. And just about the worst one o' them all came on Christmas Day, when the year was almost over. Here, let me pour you a small—ah—libation before I start . . ."

It had been a quiet fall in Northmont since the kidnaping and recovery of little Tommy Belmont. In fact, about the biggest news around town was that the new Ford dealer over in Middle Creek would soon be selling dark green and maroon cars along with the traditional black ones.

"You see, Dr. Sam," my nurse April said, "pretty soon you won't be the only one round these parts with a bright yellow car."

"Dark green and maroon are a long way from yellow," I reminded her. Kidding me about my 1921 Pierce-Arrow Runabout was one of her favorite sports. My first winter in Northmont I'd put the Runabout up on blocks and driven a horse and buggy on

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my calls, but now I was gettin' a bit more venturesome. As long as the roads were clear I drove the car.

This day, which was just two weeks before Christmas, April and I were drivin' out to visit a small gypsy encampment at the edge of town. The traditionally cold New England winter hadn't yet settled in, and except for the bareness of the tree limbs it might have been a pleasant September afternoon.

The gypsies were another matter, and there wasn't much pleasant about their encampment. They'd arrived a month earlier, drivin' a half-dozen horse-drawn wagons, and pitched their tents on some unused meadowland at the old Haskins farm. Minnie Haskins, widowed and into her seventies, had given them permission to stay there, but that didn't make Sheriff Lens and the townsfolk any happier about it. On the few occasions when gypsies had appeared at the general store to buy provisions they'd been treated in a right unfriendly manner.

I'd gone out to the encampment once before to examine a sick child, and I decided this day it was time for a return visit. I knew there wasn't much chance of gettin' paid, unless I was willin' to settle for a gypsy woman tellin' April's fortune, but still it was somethin' I felt bound to do.

"Look, Dr. Sam!" April said as the gypsy wagons came into view. "Isn't that Parson Wigger's buggy?"

"Sure looks like it." I wasn't really surprised to find Parson Wigger visiting the gypsies. Ever since comin' to town last spring as pastor of the First New England Church he'd been a controversial figure. He'd started by reopening the old Baptist church in the center of town and announcin' regular services there. He seemed like a good man who led a simple life and looked for simple solutions—which was why so many people disliked him. New Englanders, contrary to some opinions, are not a simple folk.

"'Mornin', Dr. Sam," he called out as he saw us drive up. He was standin' by one of the gypsy wagons, talkin' to a couple of dark-haired children. "Mornin', April. What brings you two out here?"

"I treated a sick boy a while back. Thought I'd see how he's coming along." I took my bag from the car and started over. Already I recognized my patient, Tene, as one of the boys with the parson. "Hello, Tene, how you feeling?"

He was around eleven or twelve, and shy with non-gypsy *gadjo* like myself. "I'm okay," he said finally.

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"This the boy who was sick?" Parson Wigger asked.

I nodded. "A throat infection, but he seems to be over it."

At that moment Tene's father appeared around the side of the wagon. He was a dark brooding man with a black mustache and hair that touched the top of his ears, leaving small gold earrings exposed. Though Parson Wigger was the same size and both men looked to be in their mid-thirties, they could hardly have been more different. Except for an old arm injury which had left him with a weak right hand, Carranza Lowara was the picture of strength and virility. By contrast Wigger gave the impression of physical weakness. The Parson's hair was already thinning in front, and he wore thick eyeglasses to correct his faulty vision.

"You are back, Doctor?" Tene's father asked.

"Yes, Carranza, I am back."

He nodded, then glanced at April. "This is your wife?"

"No, my nurse. April, I want you to meet Carranza Lowara. He is the leader of this gypsy band."

April took a step forward, wide-eyed, and shook his hand. "Pleased to meet you."

"I'm trying to help these people get settled for the winter," Parson Wigger explained. "These wagons are hardly good shelter for twenty people. And the two tents are not much better."

"We have lived through the winters before," Carranza Lowara said. He spoke English well, but with an accent I hadn't been able to place. I supposed it must be middle European.

"But not in New England." The parson turned to me and explained. "They came up from the south, as do most gypsies. I've encountered them before in my travels. Spain deported gypsies to Latin America hundreds of years ago and they've been working their way north ever since."

"Is that true?" I asked Lowara. "Do you come from Latin America?"

"Long, long ago," he replied.

I happened to glance back at my car and saw a gypsy woman in a long spangled skirt and bare feet. She was examining my car intently. I'd seen her on my previous visit, and suspected she was Lowara's wife or woman. "Is she of your family?" I asked.

"Come here, Volga." The woman came over promptly and I saw that she was younger than I'd first supposed. Not a child, certainly, but still in her twenties. She was handsomer than most gypsy women, with high cheekbones and slightly slanted eyes

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that hinted at a mixture of Oriental blood. I introduced her to April and they went off together to visit the other wagons.

"She is my wife," Lowara explained.

"Tene's mother?"

"Yes."

"She seems so young."

"Gypsy women often marry young. It is a custom. You should come to a gypsy wedding sometime and see the groom carry off the bride by force. It is not like your Christian weddings, Parson."

"I imagine not," Parson Wigger replied dryly. "But I will come to a gypsy wedding only if you honor me with your presence at my church."

The gypsy shook his head. "Your townspeople do not like us."

"They might like you more if they saw you attending Christian services."

Lowara shrugged. "We have no religion. We would as soon go to your church as any other."

"Come, then, on Christmas Day. It's just two weeks away. Once you know the people and are friendly with them, you might even find an old barn to stay the winter."

"Would a barn be any warmer than our tents? I think not."

"Come anyway," the Parson pleaded. "You won't regret it."

The gypsy nodded. "I will talk to the others. I think you will see us in two weeks."

Parson Wigger walked me back to my Runabout. "I think their appearance on Christmas morning will have a good effect on the townspeople. No one can hate a fellow Christian on Christmas."

"Some call them beggars and thieves. They say the women are good for nothing but telling fortunes."

"They are human beings with souls like the rest of us," Parson Wigger reminded me.

"I agree. You only have to convince a few hundred of your fellow citizens." I didn't have to remind him that his own popularity in Northmont was not too high at that moment.

April came back from her tour of the wagons and we drove away with a wave to Parson Wigger. "He's really tryin' to help those people," she said. "That Volga thinks highly of the Parson."

"She's Lowara's wife. She must have been a child bride. I treated her son and never even knew she was the mother."

"There's an old woman in one wagon who tells fortunes," April said with a giggle.

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"She tell yours?"

April nodded. "Said I was gettin' married soon."

"Good for you." April was some years older than me, in her mid-thirties, and not the most beautiful girl in town. I figured the old gypsy woman was a good judge of human nature.

On Christmas mornin' it was snowin' gently, and from a distance down the street Parson Wigger's church looked just the way they always do on greeting cards. I wasn't that much of a churchgoer myself, but I decided I should show up. Last Christmas I'd spent the entire day deliverin' a farm woman's baby, and an hour in church sure wouldn't be any harder than that.

Parson Wigger was out front, bundled against the cold and snow, greetin' the people as they arrived. I waved to him and stopped to chat with Eustace Carey, who ran one of Northmont's two general stores. "How are you, Doc? Merry Christmas to ye."

"Same to you, Eustace. We've got good weather for it—a white Christmas but not too white."

"Folks say the gypsies are comin' to the service. You heard anything about it?"

"No, but it is Christmas, after all. Nothin' wrong with them comin' to church."

Eustace Carey snorted. "What's wrong is them bein' here in the first place! I think they hexed old Minnie to get permission to camp on her land. These gypsy women can hex a person, you know."

I was about to reply when a murmur went up from the waiting churchgoers. A single crowded gypsy wagon pulled by a team of horses was comin' down the center of the street. "Looks like they're here," I remarked to Carey.

It was obvious then that Parson Wigger had been standin' in the snow for exactly this moment. He hurried out to the wagon and greeted Lowara and the others warmly. It seemed that all the gypsies had come, even the children, and after the Parson shook hands with them, they filed into church.

"I don't like 'em," Carey said behind me. "They look funny, they smell funny, they got funny names."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Eustace."

We followed the gypsies into church and took our seats in one of the front pews. I glanced around for April, then remembered that she'd be at the Catholic church on the other side of town.

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After a few moments' wait Parson Wigger came out wearin' his traditional long black cassock and white surplice. He carried a Bible in one hand as he mounted the pulpit and then began to speak. "First of all, I want to wish each and every one of my parishioners—and I feel you are *all* my parishioners—the very merriest of Christmases and the happiest of New Years. I see 1926 as a year of promise, a year of building our spiritual lives."

I'd never been a great one for listening to sermons, and I found my eyes wandering to the double row of gypsies down front. If the sermon was boring them too, they were very good at masking their feelings. Sitting right behind them, and none too happy about it, was old Minnie Haskins who'd given them permission to use her land.

Later, when Parson Wigger had concluded his sermon and prayer service, and we'd sung the obligatory Christmas hymns, I sought out Minnie Haskins in the back of the church. Despite her years she was a spry little woman who moved about with remarkable agility. "Hello there, Dr. Sam," she greeted me. "Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas to you, Minnie. How's the leg?"

"Fit as a fiddle!" She did a little kick to show me. "A touch o' rheumatism can't keep me down!" Then she pulled me aside as the others were leaving and whispered, "What're all them gypsies doin' here, Doc? I'm in enough trouble with folks for lettin' them camp on my farm. Now they come to church!"

"It's Christmas, Minnie. I think they should be welcomed at church on Christmas Day."

"Well, lots o' folk are upset with Parson Wigger for invitin' them, I'll tell ye that!"

"I haven't heard any complaints yet except from Eustace Carey."

"Well, him an' others."

Carey joined us then, still grumbling. "Soon as I can get the Parson alone I'm goin' to give him a piece o' my mind. Bad enough fillin' the church with gypsies but then he takes 'em right down front."

"Where are they now?" I asked.

"Would you believe it? He's taken them up in the steeple to show them the view!"

I followed them out to the sidewalk and we looked up through the fallin' snow at the towerin' church steeple. Though each of

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its four white sides had an open window for the belfry, no bell had rung there since its days as a Baptist church. The Baptists had taken their bell with them to a new church in Groveland and Parson Wigger hadn't yet raised enough money to replace it.

As we watched, the gypsies began comin' out of the church and climbin' back onto their wagon. "They can't read or write, you know," Carey said. "No gypsies can."

"Probably because they haven't been taught," I replied. "A little schoolin' for the youngsters like Tene would help."

"Well," Carey said, "I'm still goin' to talk with the parson about this, soon's I can catch him alone."

I glanced around for Minnie but she'd disappeared, swallowed up by the fallin' snow. We could barely see across the street now as the fat white flakes tumbled and swirled in the breeze. I could feel them cold against my face, clingin' to my eyelashes, and I decided it was time to go home. Just then Volga Lowara came out of the church and climbed into the wagon. The driver snapped the reins and they started off.

"I'm going in to see the parson now," Carey said.

"Wait a minute," I suggested. I could have been wrong but I didn't remember seeing Carranza leave the church. He might have stayed behind to talk with Parson Wigger.

"The heck with it," Carey decided at last, his hat and coat covered with fat white snowflakes. "I'm goin' home."

"I'll see you, Eustace. Wish the family a Merry Christmas." It was somethin' to say, avoidin' obvious mention of the fact that his wife hadn't accompanied him to Christmas services.

I decided there was no point in my waitin' around, either. As Carey disappeared into the snow I started in the opposite direction, only to encounter Sheriff Lens. "Hello there, Dr. Sam. Comin' from church?"

"That I am. A snowy Christmas, isn't it?"

"The kids with new sleds'll like it. Seen Parson Wigger around?"

"He's in the church. What's up?"

"Funny thing. I'll tell you about it." But before he could say more the familiar figure of Parson Wigger appeared in the church doorway, still wearin' his long black cassock but without the white surplice. For just an instant a stray beam of light seemed to reflect off his thick glasses. "Parson Wigger!" the sheriff called out, startin' through the snow for the church steps.

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Wigger turned back into the church, bumpin' against the door jamb. It was almost as if the sight of Sheriff Lens had suddenly terrified him. The sheriff and I reached the back of the church together, just in time to see Wigger's black cassock vanish up the stairs to the belfry.

"Damn!" Lens exploded. "He closed the door after him. Is he running away from us?"

I tried the belfry door but it was bolted from the other side. "He'd hardly run up there to get away from us. There's no other way out."

"Lemme at that door!"

It was an old church, and a powerful yank by Sheriff Lens splintered the wood around the loose bolt. Another yank and the door was open.

Lens led the way up the wooden steps. "We're comin' up, Parson," he called out.

There was no answer from above.

We reached the belfry and pushed open the trap door above our heads. The first thing I saw was Parson Wigger outstretched on the floor a few feet away. He was face up, and the jeweled hilt of a small gypsy dagger protruded from the center of his chest.

"My God!" Sheriff Lens gasped. "He's been murdered!"

From the trap door I could see the entire bare belfry and the snow swirling around us outside. It seemed there was not another living creature up there with us.

But then somethin' made me turn and look behind the open trap door.

Carranza Lowara was crouched there, an expression of sheer terror on his face.

"I did not kill him," he cried out. "You must believe me—*I did not kill him!*"

It was the damnedest locked-room mystery I ever did see, because how could you have a locked room that wasn't even a room—that was in fact open on all four sides? And how could you have a mystery when the obvious murderer was found right there with the weapon and the body?

And yet—

First off I'd better tell you a bit more about that belfry itself, because it was the first time I'd ever been up there and some things about it weren't obvious from the ground. The big bell was

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gone, all right, though the wooden frame from which it had hung was still in place. There was also a round hole cut in the floor, maybe four inches in diameter, through which the heavy rope for ringing the bell had passed.

But the thing that surprised me most about Parson Wigger's belfry was the thin wire mesh fencing tacked up over all four open windows. It was like chicken wire, with gaps of a couple inches between the individual strands. Since it obviously wasn't meant to keep out flies it took me a moment to figure out its purpose.

"Birds," Sheriff Lens explained, noting my puzzlement. "He didn't want birds roosting up here."

I grunted. "You can't even see it from the street, the wire's so fine."

Wigger's body had been taken away, and the gypsy had been arrested, but we lingered on, starin' through the wire mesh at the street below. "The news has really spread," Lens observed. "Look at that crowd!"

"More than he had for services. Tells you somethin' about people, I guess."

"Think the gypsy did it, Doc?"

"Who else? He was alone up here with Wigger."

Sheriff Lens scratched his thinning hair. "But why kill him? God knows, Wigger was a friend o' theirs."

There was a sound from below and Eustace Carey's head emerged through the open trap door. "I just heard about the Parson," he said. "What happened?"

"He was showin' the gypsies the view from up here. They all came down except Lowara, an' I guess he musta hid in here. We saw Parson Wigger down by the front door, lookin' out at the gypsies gettin' ready to leave, and I wanted to talk to him. He seemed to run away from us, almost, an' bolted the steeple door after him. By the time Doc Sam and I got up here, he was dead with the gypsy's knife in his chest."

"No one else was up here?"

"No one."

Carey walked over to the west side of the belfry, where the wind-driven snow covered the floor. "There are footprints here."

"He had a lot of gypsies up here lookin' at the view. Footprints don't mean a thing." Sheriff Lens walked over to the open trap door.

Suddenly I remembered something. "Sheriff, we both agree that

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Wigger looked as if he was running away from you. What was it you were so anxious to see him about?"

Sheriff Lens grunted. "Don't make no difference, now that he's dead," he replied, and started down the stairs.

The next mornin' at my office I was surprised to find April waitin' for me. It was a Saturday, and I'd told her she needn't come in. I'd stopped by mainly to pick up the mail and make sure no one had left a message for me. Most of my regular patients called me at home if they needed me on a weekend, but there was always the chance of an emergency.

But this time the emergency wasn't the sort I expected. "Dr. Sam, I've got that gypsy woman, Volga, in your office. She came to me early this mornin' and she's just sick about her husband bein' arrested. Can't you talk to her?"

"I'll see what I can do."

Volga was waitin' inside, her face streaked with tears, her eyes full of despair. "Oh, Dr. Hawthorne, you must help him! I know he is innocent! He could not kill Parson Wigger like that—the Parson was our friend."

"Calm down now," I said, taking her hands. "We'll do what we can to help him."

"Will you go to the jail? Some say he will be lynched!"

"That can't happen here," I insisted. But my mind went back to an incident in Northmont history, after the Civil War, when a black man traveling with a gypsy woman had indeed been lynched. "Anyway, I'll go talk to him."

I left her in April's care and walked the three blocks through snowy streets to the town jail. Sheriff Lens was there with an unexpected visitor—Minnie Haskins.

"Hello, Minnie. Not a very pleasant Christmas for the town, is it?"

"It sure ain't, Dr. Sam."

"You visitin' the prisoner?"

"I'm tryin' to find out when they'll be off my land. I was out there to the caravan this mornin' and all they'd say was that Carranza was their leader. They couldn't go till Carranza told 'em to."

"I thought you gave them permission to stay."

"Well, that was before they killed Parson Wigger," she replied, reflecting the view of the townspeople.

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"I'd like to speak with the prisoner," I told Sheriff Lens.

"That's a bit irregular."

"Come on, Sheriff."

He made a face and got out the keys to the cell block. We found the gypsy sitting on the edge of his metal bunk, staring into space. He roused himself when he saw me, somehow sensing a friend. "Doctor, have you come to deliver me from this place?"

"Five minutes," Sheriff Lens said, locking me in the cell with Lowara.

"I've come, Carranza, because your wife Volga asked me to. But if I'm going to help you, I have to know everything that happened in the belfry yesterday."

"I told the truth. I did not kill Parson Wigger."

"What were you doing there? Why didn't you leave with Volga and the others?"

He brushed back the long raven hair that covered his ears. "Is it for a *gadjo* like yourself to understand? I stayed behind because I felt a kinship for this man, this parson who had taken the *roms* unto himself. I wanted to speak with him in private."

"And what happened?"

"He went down after the others had left the belfry and stood in the doorway looking after them. Then he came back upstairs, quite quickly. I heard him throw the bolt on the door below, as if he feared someone might follow him. When he came up through the trap door my back was turned. I never saw what did it. I only heard a slow gasp, as of a deep sigh, and turned in time to see him falling backward to the floor."

"You saw no one else?"

"There was no one to see."

"Could he have been stabbed earlier?" I asked. "Down in the church?"

"He could not have climbed those steps with the knife in him," Lowara said, shaking his head. "It would have killed him at once."

"What about the knife? You admit that jeweled dagger is yours?"

He shrugged. "It is mine. I wore it yesterday beneath my coat. But in the crowd after services I was jostled. The knife was taken from me."

"Without your realizing it? That's hard to believe."

"It is true, nevertheless."

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"Why would anyone want to kill Parson Wigger?" I asked.

He smiled and opened his hands to me. "So a gypsy would be blamed for it," he said, as if that was the most logical reason in the world.

The snow stopped falling as I walked back to the church. In my pocket, neatly wrapped in newspaper, was the jeweled dagger that had killed Parson Wigger. The sheriff had given up any hope of finding fingerprints on the corded hilt with its imitation ruby, and had allowed me to borrow it to conduct an experiment.

It had occurred to me that the knife could have been thrown or propelled from some distance away, and that it might be slender enough to pass through the chicken-wire barricade. To test my theory I entered the unguarded church and climbed once more to the belfry in the steeple.

But I was wrong.

True, the knife could be worked through the wire with some difficulty, but coming at it straight ahead or even at an angle, the width of the crosspiece—the hilt guard—kept it from passing through. It simply could not have been thrown or propelled from outside.

Which left me with Carranza Lowara once more.

The only possible murderer.

Had he lied?

Remembering that moment when Sheriff Lens and I found him standin' over the body, rememberin' the terror written across his face, I somehow couldn't believe it.

I went back downstairs and walked around the pews, hopin' some flash of illumination would light up my mind. Finally I stuffed the dagger back in my coat pocket and went outside. It was as I took a short cut across the snow-covered side yard that somethin' caught my eye, as white as the snow, and half buried in it.

I pulled it free and saw that it was a white surplice like the one Parson Wigger had worn during the Christmas service. There was a dark red stain on it, and a tear about an inch long.

I stood there holding it in my hand, and then turned to stare up at the steeple that towered above me.

"I reckon we gotta ship the gypsy over to the county seat," Sheriff Lens was saying when I returned to the jail and placed the dagger carefully back on his desk.

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"Why's that, Sheriff?"

"Eustace Carey says there's talk o' lynchin'. I know damn well they won't do it, but I can't take no chances. It happened fifty years ago and it can happen again."

I sat down opposite him. "Sheriff, there's somethin' you've got to tell me. That man's life may depend on it. You sought out Parson Wigger on Christmas Day for some reason. It was somethin' that couldn't even wait till after the holiday."

Sheriff Lens looked uneasy. "I told you—it don't matter now."

"But don't you see it *does* matter—now more than ever?"

The sheriff got to his feet and moved to the window. Across the square we could see a small group of men watching the jail. That must have decided him. "Mebbe you're right, Doc. I'm too old to keep secrets, anyway. You see, the Hartford police sent through a report suggesting I question Parson Wigger. Seems he wasn't no real parson at all."

"What?"

"He'd been passin' himself off as a parson down Hartford way for two years, till somebody checked his background and they run him outta town. Some said he was runnin' a giant con game, while others thought he was more interested in the parish wives. Whatever the truth, his background was mighty shady."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Like I said, the man's dead now. Why blacken his character? He never did no harm in Northmont."

The door opened and Eustace Carey came bargin' in, followed by a half-dozen other local businessmen. "We want to talk, Sheriff. There's ugly words goin' around. Even if you keep that one safe, there might be an attempt to burn the gypsy wagons."

I knew then that I had to speak out. "Wait a minute," I said. "Settle down and I'll tell you what really happened to Parson Wigger. He wasn't killed by the gypsy, and he wasn't killed by any invisible demon, unless you count the demon within himself."

"What do you mean by that?" Carey demanded.

I told them what I'd just learned from Sheriff Lens. "Don't you see? Don't you all see? The Parson was standin' there in the doorway and he saw us comin' for him. It was the sight of the sheriff that frightened him, that told him the jig was up. Why else would he run into the church and up the belfry stairs, boltin' the door behind him? It was fear that drove him up there, fear of Sheriff Lens and the truth."

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"But who killed him?"

"When he heard that bolt break, when he heard us on the stairs and realized his masquerade was about to be uncovered, he took the gypsy's dagger and plunged it into his own chest. There was never any invisible murderer or any impossible crime. Parson Wigger killed himself."

It took a lot more talkin' after that, of course, to convince them it was the only possible solution. You see, I had to get Carranza out of his cell and demonstrate that he couldn't have stabbed the parson with his right hand because of that old arm injury. Then I showed, from the angle of the wound, that it had to be done by a right-handed person—unless he'd stabbed himself.

"There was no one else up there," I argued. "If Carranza Lowara didn't kill him, he must have killed himself. It's as simple as that."

They released Lowara the next mornin', and Sheriff Lens drove him out to the gypsy encampment in the town's only police car. I watched them go, standin' in the doorway of my office, and April said, "Can't you close that door, Dr. Sam? Now that you've solved another case can't you let the poor man go home in peace?"

"I have something else that must be done, April," I told her. "See you later."

I got into the Runabout and drove out over the snow-rutted roads to Minnie Haskins' place. I didn't stop at the farmhouse but continued out around the back till I reached the gypsy encampment. When Volga saw the car she came runnin' across the snow to meet me.

"How can we ever thank you, Dr. Hawthorne? You have saved my husband from certain imprisonment and even death!"

"Go get him right now and I'll tell you how you can thank me."

I stood and waited by the car, venturing no closer to the wagons where I could see little Tene playing in the snow. Presently Carranza joined me, with Volga trailing him.

"I owe you my thanks," he said. "My freedom."

I was starin' out across the snowy fields. "I owe you somethin' too. You taught me something about the different types of deception—deception as it is practiced by the *gadjo* and by the *rom*."

As I spoke I reached out and yanked at his long black hair. It came away in my hand and Volga gasped. He was almost bald

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without the wig, and seemed at least ten years older. I stripped the mustache from his upper lip too, and he made no effort to stop me.

"All right, Doctor," he said. "A little deception. Will you have me arrested again because I wear a wig and false mustache? Will you say after all that I killed Parson Wigger?"

I shook my head. "No, Carranza. This doesn't tell me that you killed Wigger. But it does tell me that Volga killed him."

She gasped again, and fell back as if I'd struck her. "This man is a demon!" she told her husband. "How could he know?"

"Silence!" Carranza ordered. Then, turning to me, he asked, "Why do you say these things?"

"Well, I proved for myself that you didn't kill Wigger. But I didn't for a minute believe that such a man would kill himself simply because the sheriff wanted to talk to him. And yet he had run away from us. That was the key to it—the key to the crime and the key to the impossibility. I was lookin' around in the church yard and in a snowbank I found this." I drew the bloodstained surplice from under my coat.

"And what does that prove?"

"See the tear made by the knife goin' in? And the blood? Parson Wigger had to be wearin' this when he was stabbed. Yet Sheriff Lens and I saw him without it in the church doorway. Are we to believe he went up to the belfry, put on his surplice, stabbed himself, removed it somehow, stuck the knife back in his chest and died—all while we were breakin' in the door? Of course not!

"So what is the only other possibility? If the body in the belfry was Wigger's, then the person we saw in the doorway was *not* Wigger. He fled from us simply because if Sheriff Lens and I had gotten any closer we'd have known he was not Wigger."

Volga's face had drained of all color, and she stared silently as I spoke. "If not Wigger, then who? Well, the man in the cassock ran up into the belfry. We were right behind him and we found two persons up there—the dead Wigger and the live Lowara. If the man in the cassock was not Wigger—and I've shown he wasn't—then he had to be you, Carranza."

"A good guess."

"More than that. I'd noticed earlier you were both the same size. At a distance your main distinguishing feature was your

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black hair and mustache. But I remembered that day two weeks ago when I was out here and noticed your earrings under your short hair. When I visited your cell, your hair was long enough to cover your ears. It couldn't have grown that fast in two weeks, so I knew you were wearing wigs. If the hair was false, the mustache could be too—mere props to add to your gypsy image. A bit of deception for the *gadjo*."

"You have proved I was Wigger for a fleeting moment. You have not proved Volga killed him."

"Well, what did you accomplish by posing as Wigger? From a distance with our vision blurred by the falling snow, the sheriff and I saw only a tall man in a black cassock, wearing Wigger's thick glasses. If we hadn't come after you we'd have gone away convinced that Wigger was still alive after Volga and the others had left the church. You did make two little slip-ups, though. When you turned away from us in the church doorway you bumped into the frame because you weren't used to his thick glasses. And yesterday in the cell you told me how Wigger had stood in the doorway—something you couldn't have seen if you'd really been in the belfry all that time, as you said."

"That does not implicate Volga!" the gypsy insisted.

"Obviously you weren't doing this to protect yourself, because it gave you no alibi. No one saw you leave the church. The only possible purpose of your brief impersonation was to shield another person—the real killer. Then I remembered that Volga was the last gypsy to leave the church. She'd been alone in there with Wigger, she was your wife, and she was the most likely person to be carrying your little dagger. Where? In your stocking top, Volga?"

She covered her face with her hands. "He—he tried to—"

"I know. Wigger wasn't a real parson, and he'd been in trouble before because of his interest in parish wives. He tried to attack you up there, didn't he? You were only a handsome gypsy woman to him. He knew you could never tell. You fought back, and your hand found the dagger you always carried. You stabbed him up there and killed him, and then you found Carranza in the church and told him what you'd done."

"It would have been a gypsy's word against a parson's reputation," Carranza said. "They would never believe her. I sent her back with the wagon and tried to make it look as if he was still alive."

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I nodded. "You put on his cassock because at a distance the bloody rip in the cassock wouldn't show on the black cloth. But you couldn't wear the white surplice without the blood showing. You barely had time to get the cassock back on Wigger's body, stuff the surplice through the chicken wire, and push it out so it wouldn't be found in the belfry. You couldn't put that back on the body because you hadn't been wearing it downstairs."

Carranza Lowara sighed. "It was hard work with my weak hand. I got the cassock back on the body just as the lock gave way. Will you call the sheriff now?"

I watched his son playing with the other gypsies, and wondered if I had the right to judge. Finally I said, "Pack up your wagons and be gone from here by nightfall. Never come near Northmont again."

"But—" Carranza began.

"Wigger was not a good man, but maybe he wasn't bad enough to deserve what he got. I don't know. I only know if you stay around here I might change my mind."

Volga came to me. "Now I owe you more than ever."

"Go. It's only a Christmas present I'm giving you. Go, before it fades like the melting snow."

And within an hour the wagons were on the road, heading south this time. Maybe they'd had enough of our New England winter.

"I never told anyone that story," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "It was the first time I took justice into my own hands, and I never knew if I did right or not. No, the gypsies didn't come back. I never saw them again."

He emptied the last of the brandy and stood up. "It was in the spring of '26 that a famous French criminal sought shelter in Northmont. He was called the Eel because of his fantastic escapes. But I'll save that story till next time. Another—ah—libation before you go?"

"Q"

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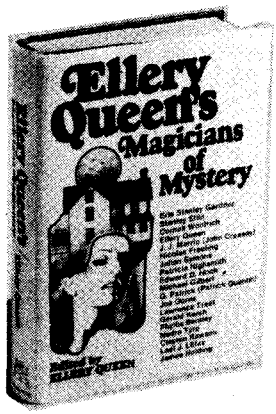

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